Baopuzi (抱朴子)

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The ideas, methods, and substances described within reflect the cultural, medical, and alchemical understanding of early medieval China. They are not intended as practical instruction or endorsement of any action, ritual, or experiment.

Readers should be aware that the original text includes references to:

The ingestion or preparation of minerals, metals, and elixirs that may be toxic or prohibited under modern law.

Practices such as fasting, self-deprivation, or exposure that may be physically harmful if imitated.

Descriptions of punishment, moral judgement, or ritual severity reflecting the values of Ge Hong's era rather than those of today.

Neither the translator, editor, nor publisher advocates or condones any action that could endanger health, violate modern laws, or cause harm to oneself or others.

This work is offered as a spiritual, historical, and intellectual document, intended to preserve and interpret an important expression of early Taoist thought and moral philosophy.

Readers are encouraged to approach the text with critical and respectful discernment, recognizing that its value lies in its insight into human nature, virtue, and the search for harmony between spirit and world — not in the literal application of its more esoteric methods.

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Inner chapters (內篇)

Chapter 1 - The Discourse on the Mysterious (暢玄)

1. On the dao

The Mystery is the first ancestor of Nature, the great source from which the ten thousand distinctions arise(All things).

It is so deep that one calls it subtle.

It is so far-reaching that one calls it wondrous.

Its height crowns the nine heavens, its breadth covers the eight directions.

It shines brighter than the sun and moon, it moves swifter than lightning.

Sometimes it flashes and vanishes, sometimes it drifts like falling stars.

It ripples within the clear abyss, it floats as clouds of mist.

From its signs all forms arise, from its stillness all emptiness begins.

It sinks into the great darkness, it rises to the limits of the stars.

No metal equals its firmness, no dew equals its softness.

It is square yet beyond measure, round yet beyond rule.

It comes unseen, it goes unpursued.

Heaven is high because of it, Earth is low because of it.
Clouds move through it, rain falls by it.

It gives birth to the One Origin, it molds the Two Forms.
It breathes out the Great Beginning and forges the myriad kinds.

It turns through the cycles, it shapes the dim beginnings.
It guides the hidden mechanism, it breathes forth the Four Qi.

It folds within silence and opens into brilliance.
It lifts the clear and presses down the turbid.
It blends the waters of the Yellow River and the Wei.

Add to it and it does not overflow.
Draw from it and it does not fail.
Give to it and it does not grow.
Take from it and it does not decay.

Where the Mystery abides, joy is endless.
Where it departs, form decays and spirit flees.

The five tones and eight melodies deafen the ear.
Bright colors and shining hues wound the eye.
Feasts and fragrant wine disturb the nature.

Painted faces and graceful forms destroy the destiny.

Only the Way of the Mystery endures forever.

Those who do not know it, though they wield life and death with a glance, though their words move the rise and fall of kingdoms,

they dwell in halls that hang above the clouds, in jeweled chambers of green and gold.

Their silken curtains gather like mist, their gauze canopies drift like clouds.

Golden cups pass in splendor, clear strings sing together, dancers whirl in patterned grace, the flute cries toward the sky.

Feathered canopies float upon rippling pools, blossoms are gathered in the orchid garden, crimson petals drift on the pearl ponds.

They climb high peaks and forget all sorrow.

They lean over cliffs and forget hunger.

They enter shining halls with a thousand doors.

They ride forth in scarlet carriages.

But when joy reaches its height, sorrow begins.

When fullness is complete, loss follows.

When the song ends, sighs arise.

When the feast is over, the heart grows sad.

This is the law of things, as shadow returns to sound.

What is borrowed cannot be real.

When it passes away, something always seems lost.”

2. On those who follow the way

“The Way of the Mystery is found within.

Those who guard it keep it without.

Those who use it act through spirit.

Those who forget it remain in form.

This is the essence of the Mysterious Way.

Those who gain it are noble, without the threat of kings.

Those who embody it are rich, without rare treasure.

It is too high to climb, too deep to measure.

They ride upon flowing light, they drive upon the flying shadow.

They soar through the Six Voids, they pierce the realm of harmony.

They pass through the gate of the Vast Beyond, they wander the fields of the subtle and unseen.

They are free within the land of dream and trance.

They drift beyond the bounds of form.

They swallow the Nine Blossoms above the clouds, they taste the Six Breaths in crimson light.

They roam through the faint and the formless, they soar through the rare and fine.

They tread the curling rainbow, they step upon the turning stars.

Such are those who have attained it.”

3. Immortals, continued

“The next are those who know true contentment.

Knowing contentment, they can withdraw and remain unused, they nourish their light among mountains and forests.

They fold the wings of dragon and phoenix among ordinary men, they grow vastness of spirit within their humble homes.

In patched robes and rope belts, they will not trade for robes of jade.

With staff and sandals, they do not envy the carriages of nobles.

They hide their gems in the mountain caves, safe from the chisels of thieves.

They sink their scales into the dark abyss, beyond the reach of fire and hook.

They move and rest with understanding, and wherever they go it is enough.

They cast away the glitter of the court, they avoid the perilous road.

Singing among blue cliffs, the world turns to dust.

Smiling beneath tall trees, the red gates fade to plain wood.

They plow the soil and it feels like holding a scepter.

They drink spring water and it tastes like fine wine.

They find more joy than kings in the fields of peace.

They make equal the noble and the base in the place of stillness.

Pure and simple, without desire or sorrow, they preserve the true vessel and rest in quiet flavor.

Vast and open, they are one with creation.

Deep and wide, they share the measure of Heaven and Earth.

Dark yet bright, turbid yet clear, slow yet swift, empty yet full.

They would not leave the craftsman's seat to sit among butchers.

They would not cast aside the ruler's rule to help a wounded hand.

They are not troubled by small matters, nor swayed by praise or blame.

External things cannot stain their purity, gain and loss cannot touch their heart.

Wealth and power cannot tempt them.

Poverty and pain cannot move them.

Boiling cauldrons cannot frighten them.

Slander and insult cannot make them grieve.

Their hearts are free from the world's noise.

They are never entangled with things."

“To use a precious pearl to strike a sparrow, to lick a sore for a chariot, to climb a rotten cord for a nest, to swim a raging river for fish — these are the ways of foolish men.

In the morning they are honored guests.

In the evening they are beasts of the field.

Their beams bend, their roofs collapse.

They drown and cannot rise again.

The world races to follow them, yet the wise look on in sadness.

The Perfected conceal their music and hide their brilliance.

They spread their six wings over the ruins of cities, yet they do not trouble the reeds for defense.

They fold their scales and horns in the land of non-use, without relying on walls or arms.

They look down without pride, they look up without regret.

No one knows them.

Distant and vast indeed.”

Chapter 2 - On Immortals (論仙)

1. Questioning Immortality

Someone asked: “Can it truly be believed that spirits and immortals do not die?”

Baopuzi replied:

“Even if one possesses utmost clarity, all things with form cannot be entirely seen.

Even with supreme hearing, all sounds cannot be fully heard.

Though one might have feet like the giant Zhang and Zhuhai/Shuhai(大章豎亥之足), there are always more places he has not stepped than those he has.

Though one might have the wisdom of Yu(禹), Yi(益), Qi(齊), and Xie(諧), what they knew was far less than what they did not know.

Among the myriad things, there is nothing that does not exist. How then could there not be immortals among men?

The Way of not dying, how could it possibly not exist?”

Editors Note - Yu, Yi, Qi, and Xie are great sages. Zhuhai or Shuhai and Zhang are mythological giants.

2.The Skeptic’s Argument

Then the questioner laughed aloud and said:

“Everything that begins must end; everything that exists must perish.

Thus the sages of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors died.

The wise like Qu Yuan(屈原), Zhang Liang(張良), and Fan Li(范蠡) also perished.

The eloquent, the brave all died. This is the constant order of things.

We see plants that wither before frost, trees that fade even in summer, grains that bear ears but do not ripen, fruits that wither before maturing.

Never have we heard of anyone who lived ten thousand years, or who beheld the ages unending.

Therefore, the ancients sought learning but not immortality. They spoke of morals, not miracles.

They rejected strange doctrines and held to the natural order.

They separated the tortoise and crane as different species, and regarded death and life as morning and evening.

To labor in vain and restrain oneself for fruitless pursuits is like carving ice or chiseling rotten wood. One can never succeed.

Better to spread great strategies to aid the world, and receive blessings in one's time.

Ride in purple chariots, drive black dragons, exchange simple steps for ornate wheels, replace the farmer's plow with the cauldron of feasts. Is that not fine?

When I read the poet's rebukes of vain farming, and ponder how even Confucius himself died, why should I grasp the wind that has no form, try to catch the shadow that cannot be seized, seek things that cannot be found, and travel roads that cannot be reached?

To abandon glory and enter hardship, to forsake what is easy and pursue what is most difficult. This is like a mourner chasing a wandering girl, certain to regret both losses.

Ban(Ban Gu (班固)) and Di(Di Du (狄杜) or Di Mo) could not make sharp needles from stone, and Ou Yezi(歐冶子) could not forge a sword from lead or tin.

What cannot be done, not even gods or spirits can do it. What cannot be made, not even Heaven and Earth can make it.

How then could there be such a secret that turns the old to youth and brings the dead to life?

You would extend the life of a mayfly to match the cycles of the calendar, make a mushroom that blooms at dawn endure through countless months. Is this not absurd?

I urge you to think nine times, and not stray too far into delusion."

Editors note – Qu yuan is a famous poet and statesman of Chu. Auroth of Li sao(離騷) – Encountering Sorrow.

Zhang liang is a legendary strategist who helped to overthrow the Qin. He is immensely intelligent.

Fan Li was an advisor to King Goujian of Yue. A great merchant.

Ban is a master artisan. Di is a famed craftsman/ tool maker.

Ou Yezi is a legendary swordsmith of the Spring and Autumn period, 6th century BCE. Apparently he forged divine swords.

3.The Master's Reply

Baopuzi said:

"When hearing is lost, even thunder cannot make one listen. When sight is abandoned, even the sun, moon, and stars cannot make one see.

Is this because thunder is faint, or the sun and moon are dim?

No, it is because the deaf call it silence, and the blind call it emptiness.

If the deaf and blind cannot perceive sound or color, how could they judge the harmony of strings or the brilliance of dragons in the mountains?

Thus, those bound by the senses of form do not believe in the powers of heaven or the images of mystery.

How much less, then, can they comprehend subtler things?

When the heart is dark and the spirit clouded, one does not even believe that there were sages like Zhou(Zhou Gong (周公)) and Confucius(孔子 孔丘). How then could one believe in the Way of the Immortals?

Life and death, beginning and end, indeed, these are grand principles.

Yet in their differences and varieties, they are not fixed.

Transformations among all beings are innumerable. Phenomena appear in infinite forms.

To say ‘all that begins must end’ is a limited view.

Summer seems long, yet wheat and rye wither in its midst.

Winter seems lifeless, yet bamboo and pine flourish.

If beginnings must always end, why then are Heaven and Earth without limit?

If life must always die, why do the tortoise and crane endure?

Great yang brings heat, yet even summer has cool days.

Deep yin brings cold, yet in winter there are moments of warmth.

All rivers flow east, yet some flow north.

Earth is the stillest of things, yet quakes and collapses arise.

Water is cold by nature, yet there are hot springs in the valleys.

Fire is hot by nature, yet there are cold flames on Mount Xiao(嶕山, legendary mountain).

Heavy things should sink, yet floating stones are found in the southern seas.

Light things should float, yet the Yang branch has birds whose feathers sink in water.

The world's myriad differences cannot be judged by one rule. Such has always been so."

Editors note – Confucius is a revered sage. Zhou is the duke of Zhou.

4.Human Nature and Difference

"Among all living beings, none are more spiritual than humans.

If all noble natures were equal, then wisdom and folly, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, purity and corruption, speed and slowness, desires and choices, why would they differ so greatly, as far apart as ice and fire, heaven and earth?

Then why be surprised that some beings attain immortality, while ordinary people die?"

5.Metamorphosis in Nature

"If one claims that all beings have fixed natures and cannot change, then how do we explain the pheasant turning into a sea clam, the sparrow into a mollusk, the earth grub growing wings, the frog transforming and flying, the oyster becoming a mayfly, the pondweed turning into a midge, the field mouse becoming a quail, rotten grass turning into fireflies, the alligator becoming a tiger, and the snake turning into a dragon?

Are these not all real transformations?"

6. On Transformation and Rebirth

“If one says that humans alone possess a fixed, righteous nature different from all other beings, and that Heaven bestows life without distinction, then how is it that an ox becomes a tiger, an old woman of Chu becomes a turtle, the spirit Zhi Li(支離) becomes a willow, a girl of Qin becomes a stone?

Why do some die and live again, why do men and women exchange forms, why does Lao Peng(老彭) live long while an infant dies young?

If differences truly exist, then how could there be limits to transformation?”

Editors note – Unsure on Zhi Li. Seems to mean “the disjointed” or “fragmented one.”. Seemingly referring to a formless being transformed into matter.

7. On the Reality of the Immortals

“The immortals nourish the body with medicines and prolong life through arts and methods.

They prevent inner illness and ward off outer harm.

Thus, though they live long and do not die, their form does not decay.

If one has the Way, this is not difficult.

But the shallow-minded cling to convention and worldly custom.

They say, ‘Since no one in the world has seen an immortal, there must be none.’.

Yet what is seen by the eyes, how little that is!

Heaven and Earth have no outside. How vast they are.

Within them, how could marvels be few or limited?

Men look up to the sky yet do not know what lies beyond it.

They tread the earth all their lives and never know what lies beneath.

Even their own bodies, they do not understand the working of their own hearts and minds.

They know that life and death are within themselves, yet not how long or short they may be.

How much less, then, can they judge the distant mysteries of immortality and the deep subtleties of the Dao?

To decide on such matters by the short reach of ears and eyes, is that not pitiful?"

8. Why the World Cannot See the Immortals

"Suppose there were a sage of great wisdom, who retires in seclusion, hides his brilliance, leaves falsehood and desire behind, holds to simplicity and purity, and rejects worldly affairs.

Even such a man is seldom recognized by the world.

He may act beyond fame and form, and gain spirit within humble appearance, yet few perceive him.

How much less the immortals, who walk a different path entirely who take wealth as misfortune, glory as defilement, fine treasures as dust, and reputation as morning dew.

They tread fiery winds without being burned, step upon the dark waves and leave no trace, soar through clear dust on wings of light, ride cloud-chariots drawn by the wind, rise above the Purple Summit, and rest upon Mount Kunlun.

How could such beings be seen by those who walk as corpses in the world?

Even if they pass through the human realm for amusement, they hide their true form and appear ordinary.

They mingle shoulder to shoulder with the crowd. Who could recognize them?

If they were as clearly marked as men with square pupils or double ears upon their heads, if they rode dragons like Ma Huang(麻黄, ephedra herb) or purple gold cranes, then people could know them.

But since they are not so, how can those without inner vision see their forms, or those without deep hearing hear their voices?

The common people, not only disbelieving, also mock and slander so the True Ones hide themselves still more deeply.

What common men love, the highest sages despise.

What the vulgar honor, the perfected scorn.

Even noble scholars and great spirits who nourish their vast energy

do not enjoy meeting shallow or worldly men.

How much less would the immortals wish to show themselves to the coarse and ignorant?

Men see a hundred steps ahead but not clearly,yet they wish to judge what exists and what does not by such sight, then indeed, much of the world would seem nonexistent to them.

This is like testing the sea with one’s finger, and saying, when the finger reaches its limit, that the water ends.

A mayfly compares itself to a giant turtle, a single day to the lifespan of the Great Tree. How could it possibly understand?

Emperor Wen of Wei(Cao Pi (曹丕) of Cao Wei (魏文帝) or Yuan Baoju (元寶炬) of Western Wei (西魏文帝)) once claimed he had read and seen all things under Heaven.

He said there was no knife that could cut jade, no cloth that could be cleansed by fire.

Yet before long, both things appeared before him.

He sighed deeply and destroyed his earlier essay for indeed, nothing is fixed in this world.

Prince Chen Si(陳思王, 曹植) wrote On Dispelling Doubt(辨惑論), saying:

'At first I thought the Daoist arts were falsehoods to deceive the ignorant.

But when I saw Emperor Wu(魏武帝, 曹操) test the adept Zuo Ci(左慈), who abstained from grain for nearly a month yet kept his strength and color unchanged, claiming he could go fifty years without eating. How could one doubt it then?

He also saw Gan Shi(甘始) use medicine to let a live fish swim unharmed in boiling oil, feed silkworms on medicated mulberry leaves so they did not age by winter, and give "Preserving Years" medicine to chicks and puppies so they stopped growing.

Another medicine fed to a white dog turned its hair black within a hundred days.'

Therefore we know: the affairs of the world cannot all be known.

To judge them only by conjecture is not reliable.

They lamented only that they could not cut off indulgence and single-mindedly study the Way of long life.

Those two princes (Emperor Wen and Prince Chen Si) were unmatched in talent and scholarship, yet they first disbelieved and later regretted deeply.

If even such men once doubted the immortals, how much less can we blame the common people who do not believe?

Liu Xiang(劉向), widely learned and subtle in reasoning, searched deeply and distinguished truth from falsehood.

He compiled the Biographies of the Immortals, numbering over seventy.

If it were all false, why would he have written it?

Ancient events cannot be witnessed directly. We rely on records and transmission.

The Biographies of the Immortals shine clearly, they surely exist.

But since the writings do not come from the hand of Confucius or Zhou Gong the world refuses to believe them.

If we reject all ancient history for that reason, then nothing written of the past could be true!

The vulgar love wealth and fame, and judge the ancients by their own greedy hearts.

They do not believe that there were those who fled the throne's offer,

refused the honors of chancellorship, like Chao(晁) and Xu(徐), Lao Lai(老萊子), and Zhuang Zhou(莊周).

If they disbelieve even such sages, how could they believe in immortals, whose path is higher still?

They say Liu Xiang was not a sage,thus his records cannot be trusted. How lamentable!

The Annals of Lu were not written by Heaven, yet Confucius used them for his Classic.

Sima Qian(司馬遷) was no god, yet Yang Xiong(揚雄) called his work a true record.

Liu Xiang was a virtuous scholar of the Han. How could his writings be dismissed?

The reason people do not believe in the art of immortality,

nor in the extension of life,

is that Qin Shi Huang(秦始皇) and Han Wu Di(漢武帝) sought it and failed,

and their adepts like Shaojun(少君) and Luan Tai(欒臺) produced no visible proof.

But we cannot, because poor men like Qian Lou(黔婁) and Yuan Xian(原憲) lacked riches,

say that there were no wealthy men like Tao Zhu(陶朱) or Yi Dun(夷敦).

Nor because of the ugliness of Wu Yan(巫咸) or Xu Liu(徐柳), deny that there were beauties like Nan Wei(南威) or Xi Shi(西施).

Even diligent farmers sometimes have bad harvests, merchants sometimes lose money, armies sometimes gain no victory.

Then why must all who seek immortality succeed?

Qin and Han may have sought but failed. Perhaps they grew weary before finishing, or lacked the true teacher.

How could that prove there are no immortals?”

9. The Mind Needed for the Way

“To seek long life and cultivate the Perfect Way depends upon will, not wealth or rank.

If one lacks the right nature, then high office and treasure only become burdens.

Why?

Because the art of immortality requires calm joy, detachment, and purity.

It cleanses desire, turns sight inward, listens within, rests the mind in emptiness, and keeps the body still.

But an emperor bears the weight of the world.

He manages the countless affairs of state, his thoughts labor through ten thousand matters.

If one thing goes astray, the Way of kingship falters.

If the people err, blame returns to him.

Strong wine clouds his spirit. Beautiful women sap his vitality.

Many things cut down the essence and disperse the mind, too many to count.

If even the bite of a mosquito keeps one from resting, and the crawl of lice prevents sleep, how much more the troubles of the empire?

How could such a one ever hide his brilliance, restrain his breath, observe long fasts, purify himself, and tend the sacred fire night and day to master the eight elixirs?

Emperor Wu of Han(漢武帝 劉徹) reigned long and gained a little benefit in nourishing life.

But his offerings and cauldrons consumed far more than they yielded.

The channels he dug could not contain the flood of his desires."

10. Why Rulers Cannot Become Immortals

"The Way of the Immortals requires stillness and non-action, forgetting the body and transcending form.

Yet rulers strike mighty drums and bells, make thunderous music that disturbs the soul and scatters the spirit.

They chase pleasures and diversions that exhaust their essence and block their hearing.

The Way requires compassion for all life, to harm no living thing.

But rulers are given to wrath and punishment.

A single swing of the yellow axe, a single command of death, and corpses lie for a thousand li(1 li = 500 meters or 1/3 miles), rivers run red with blood.

The Way forbids eating flesh and calls for fasting and purity.

But rulers feast on slaughtered beasts, fill their tables with delicacies, boil and roast countless lives, and mix rare medicines with rich wine to feed their indulgence.

The Way teaches universal love and seeing others as oneself.

But rulers conquer the weak, invade the innocent, expand their borders, destroy nations, drive men to battle and cast them into death, so that corpses fill the fields, and skulls pile high like mounds.

Qin Shi Huang left only one house in ten unruined by his cruelty.

Han Wu Di halved the population through endless war.

The blessing they sought brought curses instead.

When the virtuous spirits of the dead rise in resentment, the ghosts and men alike turn against them.

These two emperors loved the name of the immortals, but did not practice the Way.

Their knowledge was shallow, their effort incomplete.

The true secrets were hidden from them.

They never found a master who could prepare the true elixirs.

Therefore, they did not attain long life, but this is no wonder."

11. Why the Common Man May Attain the Way

"We common seekers live as poor men, exhausted and destitute.

Our households are as bare as Longqing's(隴卿, figure of poverty) walls; our bellies hunger like Yi Sang's(伊桑/伊尹, sage minister) fasting.

In winter we clutch our tattered robes against the cold, in summer we shade ourselves beneath crumbling walls.

We wish to travel far yet lack carts or boats, we wish to build or toil but have no one to aid us.

Within, we have no embroidered pleasures, without, no outings for delight.

Rich food never touches our mouths, bright colors never meet our eyes. Perfume never reaches our nose, music never enters our ears.

A hundred worries assail the heart, a thousand troubles crowd the gate.

To live thus in the world, what is there to be attached to?"

12. Why Even the Wise Fail to Attain Immortality

“Some find the secret teachings, some meet a rare and true master, yet they still cling to aged wives and weak children, and remain attached to the burrows of foxes and hares.

They hesitate until death approaches.

The days and months pass unnoticed as they grow old.

They know that long life can be attained, yet they do not practice.

They despise the stench of the world, yet cannot renounce it.

Why?

Because the feeling of love and habit is hard to sever, and the resolve to leave the world is not easily made.

How much harder for emperors and kings, rulers of the four seas whose passions and pleasures are countless.

Even if they fast for ten days or rest for a few, they soon relapse.

How could they ever abandon their beloved concubines, their dazzling ranks and honors, turn from fine food, sever all desire, forsake glory and wander alone in the wilderness seeking the spirits?

How could that be possible?

Thus, through the ages, those who attained immortality were mostly poor and humble men, not the high and powerful.

Moreover, those like Luan Tai(欒台 / 栾台, historical figure of Jin) were shallow and greedy.

They loved riches and honors, boasted of false miracles, and forgot danger for the sake of gain.

Petty deceivers, how could they prove the world has no immortals?

King Goujian(越王句踐, Spring and Autumn period ruler) once ground his anger in secret, and his soldiers rushed into fire for him.

The king of Chu loved thin waists, and his people starved themselves to please him.

Duke Huan of Qi(齊桓公) craved strange flavors, and Yi Ya(易牙, chef of Huan of Qi) cooked his own son.

The lord of Song rewarded excessive piety, and his subjects destroyed themselves to gain favor.

Whatever a ruler desires, people will do without limit.

Thus Emperor Wu of Han, loving immortals, favored the adepts too greatly, so that charlatans dared to deceive him.

Had Luan Tai truly possessed the Way, how could he have been killed?

The true adepts see titles as boiling cauldrons, seals as mourning bands, gold and jade as dirt, and palaces as prisons.

How could such men bargain for glory, sit in halls of vermilion pillars, receive endless wealth, wear fivefold seals, marry princesses, and drown in status and desire without restraint?

Such men clearly had no true Dao.

According to Dong Zhongshu's(董仲舒, Han dynasty schollar) Records of Li Shaojun's(李少君, legendary fangshi) Household,

Shaojun had the formula for not dying, but his family was too poor to buy ingredients.

So he entered the Han court to borrow funds.

When his practice was complete, he left the world.

The Palace Diaries of the Han record:

When Shaojun was about to depart, Emperor Wu dreamed he climbed Mount Song with him.

Halfway up, a messenger descended from the clouds on a dragon, saying, ‘The Great One summons Li Shaojun.’

The emperor awoke and said, ‘From this dream, Shaojun will soon leave me.’

A few days later, Shaojun claimed illness and died.

Later, the emperor opened his coffin and there was no body, only clothes and crown.

According to the Immortal Canon:

Those who ascend bodily into the void are Heavenly Immortals.

Those who roam sacred mountains are Earthly Immortals.

Those who die first and shed their corpses are Corpse-Liberated Immortals.

Li Shaojun must have been one of the latter.

In recent times, Master Hu(胡先生, daoist adept) left with Fei Changfang(費長房, daoist alchemist), and the Daoist Li Yiqi(李意期) departed with two disciples.

They all feigned death; their families buried them.

Years later, Fei Changfang returned.

Acquaintances later saw Li Yiqi and his two disciples alive in Pixian(郫县, pidu of chengdu).

Their families opened the graves and inside each coffin was only a bamboo staff inscribed in cinnabar.

All these were Corpse-Liberated Immortals.”

13. Against False Accusations

“In old times, Wang Mang(王莽, Xin dynasty founder) cited the classics to justify his usurpation but can we say that all scholars are traitors?

Sima Xiangru(司馬相如, Han dynasty poet and schollar) used his harp to win Wenjun(卓文君, Sima’s wife) but can we say that all music serves lust?

Those who choke on grain cannot blame Shennong(神農, divine farmer) for sowing it.

Those who burn in fire cannot curse the Fire Ancestor for kindling it.

Those who drown cannot fault the Yellow Emperor for making boats.

Those who drink to death cannot blame Du Yi(杜夷, physician and immortal) for brewing wine.

How then can the deceit of Luan Tai(欒台 / 栾台, Jin minister) prove that the Way of the Immortals is false?

That would be like seeing Zhao Gao(趙高, Minister of Qin dynasty) or Dong Zhuo(董卓, Han warlord) and saying there were never loyal ministers like Yi Yin(伊尹, Shang dynasty minister) or Huo Guang(霍光, Wester Han reagent) or seeing tyrants like Shang Chen(商臣, Chu prince) or Modu(冒頓, Xiongnu empire founder) and claiming there were never filial sons like Bo Qi(白起, Qin general) or Xiao Ji(蕭紀, Liang dynasty claiment).

In the Collection of Immortals there are spells to summon gods and command spirits, and methods to let men see ghosts.

The vulgar, hearing this, call it nonsense.

Some say there are no spirits or ghosts.

Some admit they exist, yet claim they cannot be summoned.

Some say those who see ghosts are born as mediums or witches, not something learned.

But the Histories of Han and Records of the Grand Historian both tell of the man Shao Weng(齊少翁, A fangshi) of Qi,

whom Emperor Wu appointed as General of Spiritual Works.

When the emperor's beloved Lady Li(李夫人, Consort of Wu of Han) died,

Shao Weng made him see her again as though alive, and even showed him the Hearth God face to face.

These are clear records.

If such arts can make ghosts appear and make the blind see them, what could they not do?

Ghosts and spirits often manifest to men with strange lights and transformations.

The scriptures are filled with evidence of them.

Yet the vulgar still refuse to believe there are spirits and how much less would they believe in immortals, who live in higher realms, pure and clear, beyond mortal sight?

Scholars like Confucians and Mohists know such things cannot be taught by reasoning, so they remain silent.

Thus, the unbelief of the vulgar is natural.

Only those who have tested many methods, seen proofs, and discerned their reality can know them. This cannot be forced upon others.

Therefore, not seeing spirits or immortals does not mean they do not exist.

Every person, wise or foolish, knows they possess a soul.

When the soul departs partly, illness comes.

When it departs wholly, death follows.

Hence, magicians have rites to recall the wandering soul, and rituals exist to summon it back after death.

This is something closest to us, yet no one has ever truly seen or heard their own soul.

Shall we then claim it does not exist?

Consider -

The spirit of Fu(傅靈 / 傅神, 傅説 Probably Fu yue, shang minister) appeared to repay kindness.

The ghost of Cheng Tang(成湯, Shang dynasty founder) punished the wicked.

Shensheng(申生, Eldest Son of Duke Xian of Jin) spoke through a fox.

Dubo's(杜伯) soul avenged his death upon King Xuan.

Pengsheng(彭生) took the shape of a black boar.

Ruyi(如意) borrowed the body of a blue dog.

Guan Fu(冠夫) haunted Tian Fen.

Zi Yi crushed Yan Jian(嚴簡).

The god Rushou descended upon Xin.

Lord Luan stopped at a peasant's home.

Lady Su Jiang(蘇姜, Wife of Duke Mu of Qin) spoke prophecies.

The ghost Xiaosun wrote essays.

The divine lord spoke in Shanglin.

Luoyang's spirit served in Wu's court.

These things are written on bamboo and silk, clear and countless, yet fools still deny them.

How much rarer, then, the affairs of long life. How could all believe?

To demand universal belief is like asking a mosquito to carry a mountain, or a toad to discuss the sea.

The common people have never seen dragons, phoenixes, or unicorns, so they claim such beings do not exist, thinking the ancients invented auspicious omens to inspire rulers toward virtue.

How then could they believe in immortals?”

14. On Liu Xiang and the Art of Making Gold

“The world says that since Liu Xiang failed to make gold, he must have been a seeker of illusions, and that his Biographies of the Immortals are false.

Alas! This is like discarding a whole jade for a tiny flaw, throwing away a priceless gem for an ant’s bite.

Such men lack the discernment of Bian He(卞和), and the true eye of Feng Hu(馮胡, An alchemist and fangshi).

The Collection of Immortals already contained methods for making gold, copied by the Prince of Huainan(劉安) into his Hongbao Pillow Book.

The texts remain, but the crucial formulas were deliberately concealed.

They must be transmitted orally, with explanation at each step, only then can one succeed.

Many ingredient names were also disguised thus Liu Xiang(劉向, Han schollar), who gained the book from his father after the Huainan case, was not properly taught the method.

He mistook the written text for the complete meaning, and therefore failed in the experiment.

As for the Biographies of the Immortals(列仙傳), he compiled them partly from the records of Yuan Cang(袁倉) of the Qin era, and partly from his own encounters, not falsehood.

Even the songs of madmen and the sayings of woodcutters may hold truth.

How could a single error make a classic worthless?

Do we reject the sun because it is sometimes eclipsed?

Foreign lands make crystal bowls by mixing five kinds of ash, now even in Jiaozhou and Guangzhou people reproduce the method.

Yet when this is told to the ignorant, they refuse to believe, saying that crystal is a natural stone.

How then could they believe that man can make gold?

Fools even deny that cinnabar and white lead are made from refining metals, or that mules are born from horse and donkey. They think all things are fixed by kind.

How much less could they grasp the deep mysteries?

Those who have seen little find much strange, that is the way of the world.

Truly this saying is right:

Even when Heaven shines bright, those who live beneath a clay pot know not the sun’s light.”

Chapter 3 - Responding to the Common World (對俗)

1. Responding to the Skeptic of Natural Immortality

Someone objected:

“Among men, there are those like old Peng(彭祖, A legendary sage) who live long, but that’s like pine and cypress among trees: born so by nature.

How could such longevity be learned?”

Baopuzi replied:

“Of all things shaped by Nature, none are more spiritual than man.

Those who understand its shallows can master and use all creatures.

Those who understand its depths can live long and endure.

Knowing that superior medicines prolong life, they take them to seek immortality.

Seeing that turtles and cranes live long, they imitate their breath and movement to increase their years.

The pine and cypress differ from common trees, the turtle and crane differ from common creatures.

As for Peng and Lao(老子, Daodejing author), they were still human, not of another species.

Their longevity came through the Way, not by nature.

Other trees cannot imitate the pine and cypress, other creatures cannot follow the turtle and crane, therefore they die early.

But people of clarity and wisdom can practice the Way of Peng and Lao, and thus share their achievements.

If one says there are no immortals, the records of the ancients name nearly a thousand, with surnames and deeds, hardly lies.

If one says they were merely born different, then why do all their biographies record study, teachers, and disciplined practice?

If the arts of the Way could not be learned, then how could transformations, swallowing blades, breathing fire, dying seated, rising standing, summoning clouds and fog, calling serpents and fish, turning stones into water, melting jade into towers, or passing through water and fire unharmed, all these be performed as written, without failure?

If such wonders are verified, how could immortality alone be false?

The Way of Immortality is slow to mature, with many prohibitions.

Without determination beyond the world, one cannot hold to it.

Some grow doubtful midway and abandon the path, then claim immortality is impossible.

But the Scripture of Immortality says:

‘He who refines the Elixir and guards the One unites with Heaven.

By returning essence and regulating breath, he prolongs life without limit.’

These are essential teachings of the True Way.

Even common gentlemen keep faith inwardly and honesty outwardly.

How could the ancient Realized Ones fabricate empty lies about impossible things to mislead posterity?

If one has no destiny for it, they will not believe and who can force them to faith?”

2. On the Longevity of the Turtle and the Crane

Someone else said:

“The turtle and crane’s long life is but a fable.

Who has ever lived beside them from birth to death to know this?”

Baopuzi replied:

“If one attains the true principle, then beyond the eight limits(八極, eight directions) all is as close as one’s palm, and the distant ages appear as if present.

We need not stand beside a thing to know its truth.

The Jade Records say:

‘A thousand-year turtle bears five colors, its brow bones rise like horns.

It understands human speech, floats upon lotus leaves, or rests beneath sacred grasses.

Above it appear white clouds and coiling serpents.’

It also says:

‘A thousand-year crane cries with the seasons, perches on trees. Before that age, it never lands upon one.

Its feathers are pure white, its brain turned fully to cinnabar.’

Seeing such, how could one doubt?

Old creatures gain wisdom and dwell in deep hidden places, that is why people rarely see them.

According to the Jade Records(玉 曆/玉歷) and Changyu Scripture, not only these two live long.

A thousand-year pine spreads wide, its top flat like a canopy.

Within it dwell beings shaped like blue oxen, goats, dogs, or men. All live ten thousand years.

Snakes live endlessly.

Monkeys live 800 years and become apes.

Apes live 500 years and become jue apes. Jue live a thousand.

Toads live 3,000 years.

Qilin live 2,000.

Divine horses like tenghuang and beasts like jiguang live 3,000.

Birds that live a thousand years, fowls that live ten thousand, all have human faces.

Tigers, deer, and hares live 1,000 years, after 500 their fur turns white.

Bears at 500 years gain power of transformation.

Foxes and wolves live 800, after 500, can take human form.

Mice live 300, after 100, they turn white and can divine fortunes, called zhong, foretelling luck and events a thousand miles away.

These are too many to record.

But the learned recognize things and thus are not deceived.

Why must one see turtles and cranes daily to know their truth?

Those who know little cannot even name plants or beasts near them, how could they know the great and strange?

The Records of Turtles say:

‘A child once used a turtle shell as his bed near the rivers of Jiang and Huai.

When he died old, his family moved the bed. The turtle was still alive.’

Even if this be only 50 or 60 years, without food or drink, it still live. How far beyond ordinary life!

Why doubt a thousand years then?

The Book of Immortals says the sages breathe like turtles, this must have reason.

The scholar Chen Zhonggong(陳仲恭) of Yingchuan wrote in his Strange Tales:

‘During war, a man named Zhang Guangding(張廣定) fled, leaving behind a four-year-old daughter.

Unable to carry her, he lowered her into an old tomb through a hole at its top, leaving some dry food and water, then departed.

Three years later, peace returned. He came to collect her bones for burial.

But he found her still sitting alive, recognizing her parents with joy.

She said that when her food ended, she saw a creature in the tomb breathing in and out.

She imitated it, and hunger vanished.

The months passed unnoticed.

Her clothes were untouched by decay, her body unchilled.’

They searched and found the creature, a great turtle.

Later, when the girl ate grain again, her stomach hurt for days before adjusting.

Does this not prove that the turtle’s art of breathing conquers hunger and death?

Both Sima Qian and Chen Zhonggong were not men of falsehood.

The ancients mentioned only turtle and crane among countless beasts precisely because they alone were truly exceptional.

To see one corner of truth is to glimpse the whole."

3. On Whether Man Can Learn from Turtles and Cranes

Another said:

"The turtle burrows in earth, the crane soars in the sky.

If man cannot burrow nor fly even for a moment, how could he learn their longevity?"

Baopuzi replied:

"Many creatures burrow, many fly.

Yet only the turtle and crane are known for long life.

Their longevity does not come from burrowing or flying.

Thus the Realized Ones only imitate their breath and movement to nourish life, not their crawling or flight.

Those who have attained the Way can soar through clouds or swim through rivers at will.

Xiao Shi(蕭史, An immortal musician) flew with a phoenix, Qin Gao(琴高) rode a crimson carp into the deep. Both were proof.

Why speak only of brief flights or rests in soil?

Dragons, serpents, crocodiles, apes. All can fast all winter and grow fatter without food.

Their secret lies not in form but in method.

Even in one excellence, things often surpass man, not turtles and cranes alone.

Taihao(伏羲, Created trigrams, nets and calinder) learned web-weaving from the spider.

Jintian(黃帝, Yellow emperor) used the nine crows to measure time. The Yellow Emperor awaited the phoenix to tune music.

Yao(堯, A sage emperor) watched the buds of the calendar plant to know months.

Birds foretold seasons.

Fish sensed flood and drought.

Wolves foresaw dynasties and the phoenix appeared at the rise of the Zhou(周, The dyansty).

So the turtle and crane's art of nourishment is no marvel.

The Immortal Scriptures contain hundreds of longevity methods, some slow, some fast, some intricate, some simple.

One need not copy the turtle or crane.

The highest adepts think beyond measure, naturally harmonizing with mystery.

Their meaning cannot be reached by the dull reasoning of common minds."

4. On Why the Ancients Knew and We Do Not

Another said:

"If we do not know how to live long, why did the ancients alone know it?"

Baopuzi replied:

“This is the talk of the narrow and ignorant, not of the wise.

Men today study the heavens, track the motions of the seven planets,

predict eclipses and omens, determine fortune from signs and diagrams, use counting rods to measure the rise and fall of armies, and infer blessing and disaster from subtle shifts.

Their principles are traceable, their forms knowable, yet even in such studies, the dull and petty cannot penetrate their mysteries.

A coarse carpenter may know the chisel, but not the art of the wheelwright.

A boy catching cicadas may reach a divine level of skill.

Everything depends on the man and his refinement.

How much more the Way of the Immortals, its depth is beyond easy grasp.

Even those like Song and Qiao, who attained effects, may not have known the causes.

How then could common men?

Since the art can be practiced, the ancients recorded it for those who understand.

If the heart comprehends and the intention aligns, then one may believe and cultivate.

But doubt is one’s own fate, not the ancients’ fault.

We should not say, ‘Why could they know while I do not?’

I know immortality can be attained;

I can fast from grain.

I have seen pearls that fly and gold and silver that can be made.

But if you ask me to explain their root principles, I also cannot fully know.

If men believe only what they can reason, and deny what they cannot, then few truths would remain.

Thus Laozi said:

‘The cat catches mice, the woodpecker heals the tree’s rot, each in its own way.’

Some things, like resin turning to lacquer or hemp fermenting into wine, cannot be reasoned yet are real.

The myriad transformations of the world, how could thought alone reach them?

If one is gravely ill and awaits medicine, must he first understand Shennong and Qibo(岐伯, Divine physician of Yellow Emeperor)’s philosophy before swallowing it?

That would indeed be foolish.”

5. On Fate and the Power of Medicine

Another said:

“Life and death are fixed by destiny.

Length and shortness are preordained.

Medicine cannot change them.

If a finger is cut off, rejoining it fails.

If blood is spilled, drinking it gives no use.

How then could eating pine and cypress prolong life?

Surely that is absurd.”

Baopuzi replied:

“If healing required sameness of kind, then since the finger and blood are of one body, why can the finger not be rejoined, or blood reabsorbed?

Yet I have seen men join severed fingers with snake fat, and transplant bird feet to chickens. Strange aids from other things cannot be denied(You can’t dismiss unusual methods or materials just because they sound strange).

If you reject other materials, should you grind flesh and boil bone for medicine, or cook skin and hair to treat baldness?

Water and earth are not the same kind as plants, yet plants depend on them to live.

Grain is not of the same species as man, yet man must eat it to survive.

Fat is not fire’s kin, water is not of fish’s race, yet when fat runs dry, flame dies. When water runs dry, fish die.

Cut a tree and the parasitic vine withers.

Stop the river crab and its shell rots.

Cut a mulberry and its insects perish. By such analogies you can see.

Gold and jade within the body prevent decay.

Salt brine upon flesh preserves it from rot.

If such substances can keep dead things whole, how strange is it that others can extend life?

To take what benefits the body and preserves life, why marvel that it can make men live long?”

6. On the Authenticity of the Alchemical Books

Someone said:

“The books on immortals and divine arts seem plausible but false, surely they were forged by enthusiasts, not written by the sages of Huang-Lao nor seen by Song and Qiao themselves.”

Baopuzi replied:

“If your view were correct, their recipes should not work, yet even the simplest of them are effective.

I have seen people draw water with the herb fangzhu(方竹, Square stemmed bamboo) under the moon, kindle fire with the sun mirror at dawn, make themselves invisible and dissolve into formlessness, change appearance to become another creature, tie a cloth to the ground and turn it into a running rabbit, stitch a needle to a belt and make it crawl like a snake, ripen fruits instantly, or cause dragons and fish to swim in basins, all exactly as written.

The Han Records say:

Luan Taichu(欒/栾太初, Han era daoist), summoned by Emperor Wu, made chess pieces move by themselves.

The Later Han Records say:

Wei Shang(魏尚, Adept daoist) died sitting upright, and Zhang Kai(張闓/開) raised clouds and mist by will.

These were written by honest historians.

All such arts belong to the same class as the immortal practices, clearly not fabrications.

If the lesser works show results, how could the greater Way of Long Life be false?”

7. On Filial Piety and Leaving the World

Another asked:

“If one who attains the Way rises to the heavens and leaves the world behind, then the ancestral rites will no longer be performed.

If our forefathers’ spirits have awareness, will they not go hungry?”

Baopuzi replied:

“To keep the body unharmed is called the highest filial piety.

How much more to attain the Way, live long, and shine with Heaven and Earth together!

This surpasses mere preservation of the corpse.

Those who ascend to the heavens tread clouds and mist, drink jade dew and golden nectar, eat blue mushrooms and red blossoms, dwell in jade halls and wondrous chambers, wander freely in the Great Clarity.

If the ancestors have awareness, they will share in this glory.

They may become assistants to the Five Emperors, guardians over the hundred spirits, holding ranks and honors unasked for, partaking in divine food and celestial drink, ruling realms of ghosts, commanding hosts of spirits.

None among them will hunger.

The highest in the Way was Laozi himself.

He had a son named Zong, who served Wei as a general and was ennobled.

Therefore, even those who pursue immortality can still have children to continue the sacrifices.

Why should ancestral rites cease?”

8. On the Different Paths of the Immortals

Another asked:

“If the adepts all possess the arts of breathing and nourishment, and can hear across a thousand miles, see the future with closed eyes, ride dragons and soar to the Isles of the Immortals, why do some remain in the world while others depart?

Their powers are alike, why do their fates differ?”

Baopuzi replied:

“My teacher said:

Immortals differ, some ascend to Heaven, some remain on Earth.

All live long; their dwelling follows their desire.

Those who refine the Golden Elixir:

If they wish to remain below, they take only half a dose.

If they wish later to ascend, they take the rest.

Immortality is assured, there is no fear of sudden death.

They may roam the world or dwell in mountains without worry.

Pengzu(彭祖, A famous sage) said:

‘In Heaven there are many high officials and great gods.

Newly made immortals hold low ranks and serve under many masters.

Thus they labor and toil, preferring to stay in the human realm for 800 years instead.’

He also said:

‘Some immortals grow wings and fly, transforming into other shapes, losing their human form —

this is not the human Way.

The human Way is to eat fine food, wear soft clothes, harmonize Yin and Yang, hold offices, keep clear senses, strong bones, radiant color, grow old without decay, live long and see far, move and rest freely, untouched by cold, heat, or ghosts, immune to weapons, poisons, sorrow, and slander.’

This is the highest state.

To abandon family, live alone among rocks and trees, cut off human ties and dwell like wood or stone. That is inferior.

In ancient times, Master Anqi(安期先生, Qin-Han era immortal alchemist), Elder Ninggong(寧公), and Lord Yang(楊君/公) all practiced the half-dose method of the Elixir.

They lived in the world nearly a thousand years before departing.

The true seekers of longevity wish only to preserve life today.

They are not anxious to soar into Heaven.

If one could remain at home yet not die, why rush to ascend?

If becoming immortal meant one must always leave the world, that would be only one way.

Pengzu’s teaching simply accords with human feeling.”

9. On Virtue and the Foundation of the Way

Someone asked:

“Must one first establish virtue before learning the Way?”

Baopuzi replied:

“Yes.

The Middle Volume of the Jade Key Scripture says:

‘Establishing merit is highest; removing faults is next.’

To save the endangered, heal the sick, prevent unjust death, these are the supreme deeds.

Those who seek immortality must base themselves in loyalty, filial piety, harmony, and faith.

Without moral cultivation, even diligent practice of techniques cannot bring long life.

If one commits great evil, the Lord of Fate shortens his years.

For lesser faults, his tally of days decreases.

Each act has weight, some lose more, some less.

Every person is born with a fixed measure of life.

Those whose original allotment is large die late, those whose allotment is small and who commit sins die early.

The scripture also says:

‘To become an Earthly Immortal, one must complete 300 good deeds.

To become a Heavenly Immortal, 1,200.

If one completes 1,199 and commits a single evil act, all prior merit is lost and must begin anew.

Goodness is not measured by size, nor evil by smallness.’

Even one who merely demands reward for good deeds lessens their merit.

If one has not completed the count of virtue, even taking immortal medicines gives no benefit.

Yet if one does good continually, even without elixirs, one will be free from untimely death.

I even suspect that Pengzu and others failed to ascend only because their merit was not yet full.”

Chapter 4 - On the Golden Elixir (金丹)

1. Baopuzi Speaks on the True Elixir

Baopuzi said:

I have examined countless writings on nurturing life and have gathered the recipes for long vision and enduring years.

Of the texts I have read, numbering in the thousands, all regard the Golden Elixir and the Returning Cinnabar as the supreme essentials.

These two are the very summit of the Immortal Way.

If one can take them and not become immortal, then there have never been immortals since ancient times.

In the recent age, when our realm was in chaos, all fled in every direction.

I travelled through the provinces of Xu, Yu, Jing, Xiang, Jiang, and Guang, meeting hundreds of wandering Daoists.

Some were men whose names had long been famed beyond the clouds, yet they were much alike.

Their understanding shallow or empty, none could truly surpass the others.

Each owned dozens of scrolls, but few could explain them. They merely copied and stored them.

Some knew breathing techniques or grain-abstinence and herb formulas.

Nearly all possessed the Book of the Mechanism of the Way (Dao Ji Jing)(道機經), calling it the ultimate secret, saying it was written by "Lord Xi."

I told them: "It was composed by Wang Tu(王圖), a general of the Wei dynasty, not an ancient sage.

He knew nothing of the Great Elixir; he sought immortality through breathing alone and thus misled many."

When I asked these Daoists about the Divine Elixirs and Golden Liquids, or about the Inner Texts of the Three Sovereigns for summoning heavenly and earthly spirits, none had any knowledge.

Most boasted falsely, claiming great age or that they had travelled with immortals. But few possessed even the slightest real understanding.

Some had heard vaguely of the Golden Elixir yet believed that only ancient immortals had attained it.

Some had partial formulas without the true scripture. Others, minor recipes, thinking those the entirety of the art.

Long ago, Zuo Yuanfang meditated deeply in Mount Tianzhu, where a divine being gave him the Scripture of the Golden Elixir of the Immortals.

At the fall of the Han, he fled south across the river, intending to enter the sacred mountains and practice the Way.

My great-uncle, the Immortal Xian Gong, received the teaching from Zuo Yuanfang(左元放, Daoist).

Three scrolls of the Taiqing Elixir Scripture(太清丹經三卷), one of the Nine Cauldrons Elixir Classic(九鼎丹經一卷), and one of the Golden Liquid Elixir Classic(金液丹經一卷).

My own teacher, Master Zheng, was Xian Gong's disciple.

He learned from my great-uncle but was too poor to afford the ingredients.

I personally served him for years at Mount Maji, sweeping and preparing incense until he at last initiated me.

We built an altar, formed a covenant, and I received the oral formulas, those never written down.

Before this, no such texts existed east of the Yangtze.

The line ran: Zuo Yuanfang → Xian Gong → Zheng Jun → myself.

Therefore none of the other Daoists know it.

Yet though I have possessed the teaching more than twenty years, I am too poor to gather the materials.

I can only sigh.

Those with chests full of gold and heaps of coin do not know of this deathless art.

Even if they hear of it, not one in ten thousand will believe.

He who drinks from the jade terrace knows the thin taste of pond-water.

He who beholds Mount Kunlun sees how low mere hills are.

Once one learns of the Golden Elixir, the petty herb-recipes seem worthless.

But since the Great Medicine is hard to complete, one must rely on lesser formulas to sustain oneself for now.

Yet though a man may swallow herbs by the wagon-load and gain slight benefit, he will never truly achieve immortality.

Hence Laozi’s secret words say:

“If you do not obtain the Returning Cinnabar and Golden Liquid, your self-discipline is vain suffering.”

The Five Grains can sustain life, by them men live, without them they die.

How much greater then is the benefit of the divine medicines above them!

The more the Golden Elixir is refined, the subtler its transformations.

Gold, when burned, never perishes; buried, it never decays.

So too, when one ingests these two substances, they temper the body and make it incorruptible and ageless.

It is like feeding a flame with fat so it cannot die, or coating the foot with verdigris so it does not rot in water.

Yet the Golden Elixir works within the body, permeating flesh and spirit, not merely as an outer salve.

The world’s multitudes doubt the True Way, that is the mark of their mediocrity.

If by chance there is a true seeker, but he never finds this teaching nor meets a true master, how could he even hear that such a wondrous art exists?

I now briefly outline the principles of the Golden Elixir to show later seekers the right direction.

Let them pursue it diligently, and not cling to shallow formulas thinking them sufficient.

If they never encounter it, they should still rest their hopes in the Infinite.

For when they hear of this teaching, they will feel as if rising from muddy ponds to the vast sea, turning from a firefly's lamp to the sun and moon, hearing thunder and despising the beating drum, seeing the great whale and realizing how small are the minnows.

But if they foolishly expect to ascend to Heaven through weak medicines, it is like whipping a lame donkey to chase the wind, or paddling a blue-dyed skiff to cross the mighty ocean."

2. On Lesser Elixirs and the Ignorance of the World

"There are countless minor elixir recipes.

Their workmanship varies in depth, therefore their power differs greatly.

A coarse brew cannot equal a perfected fermentation, just as rough wine cannot match aged spirits.

Yet even the lowest elixirs far surpass any herbal medicines.

Plants burn to ash, but cinnabar, when fired, turns to mercury and mercury, when transformed again, returns to cinnabar.

Such transformations set it far apart from common vegetation, hence it grants longevity.

Only the immortals have grasped this principle.

How distant then are they from the vulgar!

Common men, knowing little, marvel at everything.

Some do not even believe that mercury comes from cinnabar.

When told, they refuse to accept it, saying, 'Cinnabar is red, how could it become white?'

Others argue, 'Cinnabar is a stone. If you burn stones, they turn to ash. How could this one melt to silver water?'

If such simple matters they cannot grasp, how could they hear of the Immortal Way and not laugh aloud?

The ancient Realized Ones pitied future learners, so they devised these methods to free men from death. Surely words of utmost compassion.

Yet the world calls them empty lies.

If they were false, how could their formulas, precisely following number and time, always yield results?

The sages who knew these things could not be reached by ordinary minds.

I have loved these arts since youth, travelling on foot, unafraid of distance or danger, rejoicing at each rare teaching.

Though mocked, I am never disheartened.

Perhaps future seekers will surpass us; therefore I write this to instruct the discerning.

I do not praise marvels for fame, nor decorate lies for popularity.

Brilliant sunlight cannot revive dead wood.

Great wisdom cannot enlighten the willfully dull.

Books are passed to the wise; deeds are prized by the knowing.

A farmer may use a crimson bow to drive birds.

A southern tribesman may wear imperial robes to carry firewood.

What use to those who do not understand?

People spend their lives sated with food, yet never labor to learn or refine virtue.

They pass their years in pursuit of pleasure and gain, hunting, feasting, drinking, indulging in beauty, gambling, or wasting their strength in games.

Hearing words of the Way, they seem drunk.

Seeing treatises on the Dao, they fall asleep by day.

They neglect their bodies, draw near to death, and refuse to seek the arts of life.

They choose to wear and exhaust themselves.

How could such men be taught?

Those who truly possess the Way guard it in secret, seek nothing from others, and never force their words upon the unworthy.

The world often says:

‘If longevity were attainable, surely the rich and noble of old would have gained it. Since they did not, it must not exist.’

They do not know that the rich of old were no different from the rich of today.

None believed or sought the Way, all hurried after worldly desires.

How could they attain it?

Even if one cannot firmly believe that life can be prolonged or immortality attained, what harm is there in testing it?

If the trial brings only a few hundred extra years, is that not still better than dying young like common men?

The world holds myriad crafts, and among them the Way of the Elixir is hardest to understand.

How can men of middling talent decide that the art of long life does not exist?

If you say that because the world disbelieves, therefore it must be false.

Then how many wise men does the world truly have?

If someone today understands the meaning of the Dao and pursues it, must he be a fool beneath common people?

Some fear to seek long life, lest they fail and be mocked as deluded.

But if they choose doubt and die, and yet the deathless Way truly exists, will they not in turn be laughed at by those who found it?

The sun and moon do not shine everywhere, how could the human heart be solitary in its faith?

Baopuzi said:

According to the Nine-Cauldrons Divine Elixir Classic of the Yellow Emperor, 'The Yellow Emperor took it and ascended to Heaven.'."

3. On the Supreme Elixir of the Yellow Emperor

"The same classic says:

Breathing, exercises, and herbs may lengthen years, but they cannot prevent death.

Only the Divine Elixir gives endless life, joining one with Heaven and Earth, riding the clouds and driving dragons through the Pure Realm.

The Yellow Emperor transmitted it to the Sage Xuanzi, warning him:

'This Way is most sacred, entrust it only to the worthy.

Though one pile up mountains of jade, tell it not to the unfit.

When transmitting it, cast golden men and golden fish into the eastern stream as covenant. Swear in blood(Blood oath).

Without bones of immortality, none may see this art.'

The Elixir must be compounded in remote mountains where no man dwells, with no more than three companions.

Fast a hundred days, bathe in fragrant waters, keep pure, avoid filth and contact with the vulgar.

Let not the unbelieving hear of it. If they blaspheme the sacred medicine, it will not form.

When it succeeds, the whole household may become immortal, not one person only.

Yet people ignore the Divine Elixir and believe instead in herbs.

But herbs rot when buried, spoil when boiled, burn when fired.

How can what dies by itself give life to others?"

4. On the Nine Elixirs

"The Nine Elixirs are the essentials of long life, beyond the hearing of ordinary men.

The multitudes, knowing only greed for wealth and honor, are like walking corpses.

Each Elixir has its rites and diagrams for offering sacrifices — recorded in a separate scroll.

The first is the Elixir of Crimson Splendor (Dan Hua).

First prepare the Black-Yellow Base from realgar-water, alum-water, rock-salt, halite, vitriol, oyster-shell, red-clay, talc, and white-lead, mixed into the 'Six-One Mud'.

Fire it for 36 days and it forms.

After seven doses, one becomes immortal.

If you roll it into a pill and place it over fierce fire, it turns to gold instantly.

Two hundred forty zhu(1 zhu = 0.6-7g/0.2oz) mixed with 100 jin(1 jin = 500-600g/1-1.3lb) of mercury and fired likewise also becomes gold.

When the gold forms, the medicine is complete.

If the gold fails, reseal and refire as before, it will surely form."

Editors hypothesis note – List of materials are - Arsenic sulfide, Aluminum sulfate, Sodium chloride, Sulfate(could be iron sulfate as vitriol), Calcium carbonate, Iron oxide, Magnesium silicate, Lead carbonate/hydroxide and water.

Assumably all of these together would form an oxide redox like reaction and interesting acid-base and acid-metal, base-metal reactions, sublimating and re-reacting over the 36 days.

Solve(acid) and coagula(base) in cyclical sublimated leading to purified material.

Six one mud is 5 parts clay 1 part brine I believe. A sealant for the reactor vessels.

5. The Second Elixir - "Divine Elixir"

"The second is called the Divine Elixir or Spirit Talisman.

Take it for one hundred days and ascend as an immortal.

Smear it on your feet to walk upon water or through fire unharmed.

Three knife-tips (a small dose) destroy the Three Corpses and Nine Worms within, and all diseases vanish."

6. The Third Elixir - "Spirit Elixir" (神丹)

The third is also called Spirit Elixir.

Take one “knife-tip” of it, and within a hundred days one attains immortality.

Feed it to any of the six kinds of domestic animals and they will never die.

It wards off the weapons of war.

After a hundred days of use, immortal maidens and mountain spirits will appear before you in human form, attending your side.

7. The Fourth Elixir - “Returning Cinnabar” (還丹)

The fourth is named Returning Cinnabar.

Take one knife-tip. After a hundred days you become immortal.

Vermilion birds and phoenixes hover above you. Jade maidens draw near.

When one knife-tip is mixed with a pound of mercury and fired, it instantly becomes gold.

Smear this elixir upon money or objects, and in a single day they will all return to you.

If it is written upon a person’s eyes, a hundred spirits flee in terror.

8. The Fifth Elixir - “Food Elixir” (餌丹)

The fifth is called Nourishing Elixir.

Take it for thirty days and one becomes immortal.

Spirits and gods come to serve. Jade maidens approach and stand before you.

9. The Sixth Elixir - “Refining Elixir” (煉丹)

The sixth is the Refining Elixir.

Take it for ten days, and you ascend to immortality.

If mixed with mercury and fired, it too becomes gold.

10. The Seventh Elixir - “Soft Elixir” (柔丹)

The seventh is the Soft Elixir.

Take one knife-tip, after a hundred days you ascend as an immortal.

When mixed with the sap of the quebon plant and swallowed, even an old man of ninety may again beget children.

When joined in fire with metallic gold, it turns to yellow gold.

11. The Eighth Elixir - “Hidden Elixir” (伏丹)

The eighth is called Hidden Elixir.

Take it and instantly become immortal.

Carry a piece of it the size of a date pit and all ghosts will flee from you.

Write its characters above doors and gates and no demons or evil spirits dare to enter, and even thieves, tigers, and wolves are repelled.

12. The Ninth Elixir - “Cold Elixir” (寒丹)

The ninth is the Cold Elixir.

Take one knife-tip and in a hundred days one becomes immortal.

Immortal boys and jade maidens come to serve.

You rise and travel in flight without the need of wings.

13. On the Power of Any of the Nine Elixirs

Of these nine elixirs, attaining even one brings immortality.

It is unnecessary to complete them all and each may be chosen according to one's preference.

Those who take the Nine Elixirs can come and go freely.

If they wish to ascend to Heaven, they go.

If they wish to remain in the world, they stay.

They pass through barriers without hindrance and are immune to all harm.

14. The Taiqing Divine Elixir (太清神丹)

Baopuzi said:

There is also the Taiqing Divine Elixir, whose method was transmitted by the Primordial Lord (Yuanjun), the teacher of Laozi.

The Taiqing Scripture on Observing Heaven has nine chapters.

The upper three must never be taught.

The middle three have vanished from the world.

The lower three are the Elixir Scriptures - upper, middle, and lower volumes.

Yuanjun was a Great Immortal who could balance Yin and Yang, command spirits, winds, and rain, ride nine dragons and twelve white tigers.

All other immortals serve under him, yet even he said he attained this by learning the Dao and taking elixirs, not by nature alone.

The scripture says:

“The upper adept, upon gaining the Way, ascends as an officer of Heaven.

The middle adept, upon gaining the Way, dwells upon Mount Kunlun.

The lower adept, upon gaining the Way, lives long in the human world.”

Foolish people do not believe and call this empty talk.

From morning to night, they do nothing but pursue death, never once seeking life.

How could Heaven force them to live?

Men know only fine food, rich clothes, sensual pleasure, and wealth, spending their days in indulgence and perish in ignorance.

Do not reveal the Divine Elixir to such people, for they will only mock the Dao and slander truth.

To transmit the Elixir Scripture to the unworthy brings misfortune upon oneself.

If a person has deep faith, one may share the medicine after it is made but do not lightly reveal the formula.

He who knows this Way, what need has he of kings and nobles?

When the Divine Elixir is completed, not only does one live forever, but one can also make gold.

Once the gold is formed, offer a great sacrifice with one hundred catties(1 catty = 1jin).

The ritual differs from the Nine-Cauldrons sacrifices.

Each offering must be separately named and registered.

15. The Rite of Offering the Golden Elixir

Offer twenty catties to Heaven, five to the Sun and Moon, eight to the Northern Dipper, eight to the Great One (Taiyi), five to the Well constellation, five to the Hearth, twelve to the River Lord, five to the Earth Gods and Gate Spirits, and five to the Pure Lords of the House.

This totals eighty-eight catties.

The remaining twelve catties should be sealed in a fine leather pouch.

On an auspicious day, during a crowded market, cast it silently among the people and walk away without looking back.

Only after offering the hundred catties may one freely use the rest.

If one fails to sacrifice first, divine punishment will come.

The scripture also says:

“The Way of Long Life lies not in sacrifices or in serving spirits, nor in breathing or stretching exercises.

The key to ascension lies in the Divine Elixir.

To know it is difficult; to make it, even harder.

He who can complete it shall live forever.”

In recent times, at the end of the Han, Lord Yin of Xinye made this Taiqing Elixir and became immortal.

He had been a scholar of literary talent, a poet and commentator on the Elixir Classic.

He wrote detailed accounts of his studies and the forty immortals he personally knew.

This Taiqing Elixir is slightly harder to compound than the Nine-Cauldrons, but it is the highest method, the “White-Day Ascension.”

To make it, one must first prepare Flower Pond Water, Red Salt, Gen Snow, Black-White Flying Talismans, and the Three-Five Divine Waters, only then may fire be kindled.

16. The Nine-Turn Elixir Process (九轉丹)

The Nine-Turn Elixir yields immortality in proportion to its refinement:

One-turn elixir: immortality after three years.

Two-turn elixir: after two years.

Three-turn elixir: after one year.

Four-turn elixir: after six months.

Five-turn elixir: after one hundred days.

Six-turn elixir: after forty days.

Seven-turn elixir: after thirty days.

Eight-turn elixir: after ten days.

Nine-turn elixir: after three days.

When making the Nine-Turn Elixir, seal it in the divine cauldron.

After the summer solstice, heat it until the cauldron glows.

Place one pound of purified cinnabar beneath the lid, watching until sunlight strikes it.

Suddenly it blazes forth, radiant with five-colored divine light and becomes the Returning Cinnabar.

Take one knife-tip, and you will ascend to Heaven in daylight.

The Nine-Turn Elixir is sealed in an earthen pot with chaff-fire, beginning with gentle fire and ending with fierce.

From the first to the ninth turn, each stage has its proper duration.

The fewer the turns, the weaker the power, thus the more days required to achieve immortality.

The more turns, the stronger the power, thus the fewer days, the faster one ascends.

17. The “Nine-Light Elixir” (九光丹)

There is also the Nine-Light Elixir, which differs slightly in method from the Nine-Turn, though mostly alike.

It is made by combining the “Five Stones” - cinnabar, realgar, white vitriol, malachite, and magnetite.

Each stone undergoes five turnings, yielding five colors.

Thus, five stones produce twenty-five hues, one tael(40g or 1.3oz) each, stored separately.

To revive the dead (if less than three days passed), take the green elixir, mix it with water, wash the body, then insert one knife-tip into the mouth, the dead will immediately revive.

To summon food and objects, take the black elixir, mix with water, apply it to the left hand, and whatever one names will instantly appear.

To hide one's form, foresee the future, and stop aging, take one knife-tip of the yellow elixir, you will live forever, see a thousand li while seated, know fortune and disaster as if before your eyes, and understand the fates of men, their life, death, wealth, and rank.

All these methods are contained within the Taiqing Scripture.

Editors note – The colors could relate to chemical phase changes of the materials, oxide states, sulfate states, etc.

18. The Five-Spirit Elixir (五靈丹)

There is also the Five-Spirit Elixir Scripture, one scroll, containing five methods.

It uses cinnabar, realgar, orpiment, sulfur, malachite, alum, magnetite, rock salt, the "Great-One divine grain," and the Six-One Mud for sealing.

It is compounded with sacred ritual in a divine chamber, and completed in thirty-six days.

One also uses five imperial talismans, written in five colors.

This elixir grants freedom from death, though it is not as exalted as the Taiqing or Nine Cauldron elixirs.

19. The Elixir of Mount Min (岷山丹法)

The Master Zhang from Mount Min dwelt in a stone chamber and obtained this method.

He smelted yellow copper to make a vessel, to collect moon water at night.

He poured mercury over it and channeled the fire of the sun into it.

Those who take it do not die.

Another method:

Place the elixir into a copper mirror filled with mercury, set it beneath the sun for twenty days, then refine it and take it with spring water.

Within one hundred days, the blind will see again. Illnesses vanish. White hair turns black. Fallen teeth grow anew.

20. The Elixir of Master Wucheng (務成子丹法)

Place refined mercury in an eight-inch copper pan, set it over coals, brace the pan with sticks, and sprinkle sulfur water continually so it remains like wet clay.

After one hundred days of taking it, one does not die.

21. The Elixir of Xianmenzi (羨門子丹法)

Mix cinnabar with wine, one pound cinnabar to three pints wine.

Expose it to the sun for forty days.

Take it daily. In three days the Three Worms and all diseases depart.

Take it for three years, and the Dao is achieved.

Two jade maidens appear to serve.

They can summon food and drink at will.

This elixir wards off all demons and ghosts that haunt and harm homes, and averts misfortune from earth-moving and burials.

22. The “Instant Elixir” (立成丹)

There is also the Instant-Maturing Elixir, with nine formulas like the Nine Cauldrons, though lesser in power.

One version:

Melt orpiment and realgar, pour atop a copper block, seal it above bitter wine for one hundred days.

Red “milk” crystals form, sometimes five-colored like gem-stone.

Refine and take them, one lives long.

Another formula mixes this elixir with dodder-seed sap, fresh, taken at the root.

Cut through the stalk so its “blood” drips.

Mix and ingest. Immediate transformations follow.

One may shape-shift at will.

Another formula:

Combine with vermilion herb, red stem and leaves, like coral, growing beneath cliffs.

Its juice runs like blood.

Drop jade or gold into it.

They dissolve into jade wine or golden nectar.

Drink this and live forever.

23. The Cinnabar-Fish Elixir (伏丹法 / 丹魚)

In all rivers there are “elixir waters,” such as the cinnabar pools of Nanyang.

Within them live cinnabar fish.

Ten days before the summer solstice, at night one waits —

the fish rise, glowing red like fire on the water.

Cast a net and one may catch them.

Do not take too many.

Pierce the fish and smear its blood on the soles and one may walk across water and dwell beneath rivers without harm.

24. The Red Pine Elixir (赤鬆子丹法)

Red Pine Master’s formula:

Take the sap of a thousand-year lei vine and the juice of fan peach, soak cinnabar in them, place it in a non-porous vessel, seal with honey, bury it three feet in the earth for one hundred days.

Then press the red fruit of the citron tree (ning wood), mix its juice, and drink.

It turns the face and hair bright red, and grants long life.

In ancient times there was an immortal with a red beard, perhaps he used this.

25. The Elixir of Master Shi (石先生丹法)

Take a young black chick before it grows feathers, feed it beef kneaded with true cinnabar until it matures, its feathers turn red; kill it, air-dry one hundred days, pound the whole (with feathers) into powder, take one knife-tip daily.

After a hundred days one's life is lengthened five hundred years.

26. The Elixir of Master Kangfeng (康風子丹法)

Use the blood of sheep, crows, and cranes, mix with the sap of the Tianshiu plant from Mount Shaoshi, knead with cinnabar and seal inside a swan's egg, immerse it in mica-water for a hundred days and it turns to red liquid.

Drinking one spoonful extends life a hundred years, one cup adds a thousand.

27. The Elixir of Master Cui Wenzi (崔文子丹法)

Insert cinnabar into the belly of a duck and steam it.

Those who eat it prolong their years. Taken continually, they do not die.

28. The Elixir of Master Liu Yuan (劉元丹法)

Place cinnabar into dark xuan-water, let it rest a hundred days until it turns purple and does not stain the hand.

Mix with mica-water, seal in a tube, and sink it into a well.

After a hundred days it becomes red liquid.

Drink one cup for a hundred extra years.

Drink long enough and you live forever.

29. The Elixir of Master Le Zichang (樂子長丹法)

Combine malachite, lead oxide, mercury, and cinnabar.

Seal them in a bronze cylinder, cover with white sand and steam eighty days.

Take an amount the size of a bean. After three years you ascend.

30. The Elixir of Master Li Wen (李文丹法)

Wrap cinnabar in white silk, boil it in bamboo-sap called Red Spring, float it upon boiling water, mix with dark water (xuan-liquid).

Drink one cup and within a year you become immortal.

31. The Elixir of Master Yin (尹子丹法)

Mix cinnabar with mica-water, seal tightly, place it within the Golden Flower Pool for one year.

After retrieving it, take one knife-tip daily.

When a full pound has been consumed, one's lifespan extends five hundred years.

32. The Elixir of the Great One that Summons Soul and Spirit (太乙招魂魄丹法)

It uses the five stones - cinnabar, realgar, orpiment, malachite, and sulfur, sealed with Six-One Mud, like the Nine Elixirs.

It can raise the newly dead (within three days).

Take a pellet the size of a tooth, together with a sulfur pill, send both down with water and the dead revives, and will say they saw a messenger bearing a tally come to summon them back.

33. The Elixir of the Gathering Maidens (採女丹法)

Mix rabbit blood with cinnabar and honey; steam it a hundred days.

Form pellets the size of tung seeds. Take three daily.

After a hundred days, two divine maidens appear to serve and obey one's commands.

34. The Elixir of Master Jiqiu (稷丘子丹法)

Combine clear wine, hemp oil, the Hundred-Flowers Wine, and dragon-fat balm.

Seal with Six-One Mud and heat with chaff for ten days.

Take one bean-sized pellet, finish the dose and gain five hundred years of life.

35. The Elixir of Master Mozi (墨子丹法)

Place mercury and the essence of the Five Stones into a bronze vessel, boil them, stirring ten days with an iron ladle until they revert to cinnabar.

Take one knife-tip; all ailments depart, and with long use one does not die.

Also, Master Zhang Zi-he's method:

Mix lead, mercury, and malachite-water, seal, and steam among red millet.

After eighty days it forms, mix with jujube syrup to make bean-sized pills.

Taking them a hundred days gives five hundred years.

36. The Elixir of Master Qi-li (綺裏丹法)

First collect dust of the Five Stones and jade filings, mix with cinnabar and mercury, boil in a great bronze cauldron one hundred days until five colors appear.

Take it and one will not die.

If one pound of lead is fused with a hundred knife-tips of this medicine, it becomes white silver.

Mix with realgar-water and heat another hundred days and it becomes yellow gold.

If the gold is too hard, boil it in lard.

If too soft, boil it with white plums.

37. The Elixir of Master Yuzhu (玉柱丹法)

Mix cinnabar with Flower-Pool water, cover with powdered malachite and sulfur, bury the vessel in sand for fifty days.

Taking it for a hundred days brings six jade maidens and the spirits of the Six Ding and Six Jia to serve and reveal all affairs under Heaven.

Editors note – Six Ding and Jia are celestial spirit forces.

38. The Elixir "Behind the Elbow" (肘後丹法)

Combine Golden Flower water with cinnabar, seal under a roof-tile, steam it eighty days.

When finished, place a bean-sized pellet on a plate and face the sun and its radiance joins the sunlight.

Take one bean daily and live forever.

Cast some into molten bronze and it turns to gold.

39. The Elixir of Master Li Gong (李公丹法)

Use true cinnabar and water from the Five Stones, one pint each, mix into paste and boil thirty-six days.

Add molten sulfur-liquid, and after ten years of taking it, one's life joins with Heaven and Earth.

Also, Master Liu Sheng's method:

Mix juices of white chrysanthemum, paper-mulberry, and ailanthus with cinnabar, steam thirty days, grind and drink for a year.

Life extends five hundred years, old men grow young, youth never ages.

40. The Elixir of Master Wang Jun (王君丹法)

Put mercury within a chicken’s egg, seal it with lacquer, let a hen brood three eggs.

On auspicious days take the pill. It halts aging.

Children must not take it, or they will never grow.

Fed to newly born chicks or dogs, they too remain small forever.

41. The Elixir of Master Chen Sheng (陳生丹法)

Mix cinnabar with white honey, seal in a copper vessel, sink it in a well for one cycle (a full year).

Drink it. One year without hunger;

consume a whole pound, and live a hundred years.

42. The Elixir of Master Han Zhong (韓終丹法)

Boil cinnabar with honey and lacquer.

It lengthens life, sharpens sight, and makes one stand in the sun without a shadow.

43. Closing note on lesser formulas

Beyond these are many more, dozens upon dozens of secret methods, too numerous to record in full.

44. The Gold-Liquid Elixir (金液丹)

Baopuzi said:

The Gold-Liquid Elixir was taken by the Great One (Taiyi), who attained immortality through it.

It equals the Nine Elixirs in power.

To prepare it, take one pound of pure gold, together with the “Black-Bright Dragon Balm,” the Taiyi “First-Cycle Stone,” “Ice Stone,” “Purple Wanderer,” “Dark-Water Essence,” the Gold-Transform Stone, and cinnabar.

Seal them until they liquefy.

The scripture says:

“When the Gold Liquid enters the mouth, the whole body becomes golden in hue.”

Laozi received this from the Primordial Lord, who said:

“This Way is supremely precious; it appears once in a hundred generations.

Hide it within a stone chamber.

During the hundred days of preparation, keep strict purity and avoid all contact with the common world.

Build a secluded lodge beside an eastern river on a sacred mountain.

In one hundred days it is complete.

A single tael brings immortality.

If one is not yet ready to ascend, one may remain an Earthly Immortal by fasting a hundred days before taking it.

If one seeks Heaven, fast a year without grain, then take it.

Half a tael grants endless life, immune to all harm and poison, yet one may still marry, hold office, and live as one wills.

If later one wishes to rise, take the remaining half tael, and you will soar to Heaven."

Editors note – Honestly this sounds like they're making mineral psychedelics and "ascending to heaven" straight up through the nervous system into the highest areas of the brain and maybe never coming back. Or the ones who do a half does "remain on earth" as is said.

45. On the Power of Gold-Liquid and Its Offerings

To prepare Gold Liquid as the "Majestic Method of Victory," boil gold-liquid with mercury for thirty days, store it in a clay vessel sealed with Six-One Mud, bake with fierce fire for sixty hours and all turns to elixir.

A pellet the size of a bean confers immortality.

Grind one knife-tip with one pound of mercury, and it instantly becomes silver.

A pound of this elixir heated upon fire flows as red gold, called Cinnabar Gold.

Smear swords with it and no weapon can harm you for a thousand li.

Make dishes or cups of it and eat from them and you will live long.

Expose it to sun or moon to receive divine essence and drinking it prevents death.

Mix gold-liquid with yellow earth, bake in a sealed clay jar and it becomes gold again.

If reheated, it reverts to cinnabar.

Taking a bean-size dose grants the rank of Earth Immortal.

But if one steals the formula or performs it without proper oath and blood-vow in the Eastern Stream, it never succeeds.

Even the gods watch closely; false transmission brings shared misfortune to teacher and student.

46. On Difficulty and True Procedure

Baopuzi said:

The Nine Elixirs are indeed the supreme immortal medicines, but they demand many rare ingredients and constant fire for many days and nights.

Thus few can achieve them.

The Gold-Liquid Elixir is easier, only gold is hard to obtain.

In old measures, one pound of gold equals two today and costs about thirty thousand cash.

The other drugs are simpler.

No need for constant fire, place it in the Flower-Pool and let the days mature.

With forty thousand cash, one can make enough for eight people to attain immortality.

If the quantities are short, the strength will be weak, just as too little grain never brews strong wine.

Editors note - I believe flower-pool refers to a double boiler, probably filled with sand to gently heat.

47. On Eating Gold and Lesser Methods

Next comes the art of “Ingesting Gold”.

Though inferior to Gold-Liquid, it far surpasses other medicines.

Some melt gold with pork fat and wine, others refine it with tree bark or magnetic powder.

Some draw it into threads or liquefy it for drinking.

Some add realgar and orpiment so it can stretch like skin. These make one an Earth Immortal.

Silver or pearls may also be melted and drunk, though they require long, continuous use.

Few persist so patiently hence they fall short of the Gold-Liquid.

The making of these great medicines costs money and requires retreat to sacred mountains.

Therefore only one among ten-thousand may receive the scripture.

First taboo: never let unbelievers or scoffers hear or see it else their slander spoils the elixir.

As Master Zheng said, Left Master Zuo taught that in compounding these medicines one must always perform the Great Rites.

Taiyi, Primordial Lord, and Dark Lady descend to inspect the work.

If worldly fools intrude, the gods withdraw and demons enter, the elixir fails.

Hence ancient adepts secluded themselves deep within true mountains, fasting a hundred days, abstaining from pungent food and raw fish, meeting no commoners.

Only when the elixir is complete may the fast end.

Small hills lack true spirits and are haunted by wood and stone demons. They ruin medicines.

Even artisans hide fine ointments from women and children, lest impurity spoil them, how much more so divine elixirs!

48. Sacred Mountains Where Elixirs May Be Made

According to the Immortal Scriptures, true elixirs can be compounded on these holy mountains:

Mount Hua, Tai, Huo, Heng, Song, Shaoshi, Chang, Taibai, Zhongnan, Nüji, Difei, Wangwu, Baodu, Anqiu, Qian, Qingcheng, Emei, Rui, Yuntai, Luofu, Yangjia, Huangjin, Biezhu, the Greater and Lesser Tiantai, and Guacang, for there dwell rightful mountain spirits who bless the work.

Those who ascend these peaks are aided by gods.

Their elixirs succeed.

If one cannot reach them, the great islands of the sea will do such as Weng and Zhu east of Kuaiji, or Xinju and Taiguang near Xu. All fertile places where the divine plants grow.

49. Personal Reflection

Baopuzi said:

I am descended from ministers; though unfit to govern men, my kin often soar in rank and fame.

Yet I turned away from honors and festivals, farming among woods and hills with calloused hands.

People think me mad.

But the Way and worldly affairs cannot thrive together.

If one does not leave the dust of men, how can one refine such a will?

Seeing clearly, holding firm. Why should I fear ridicule or praise?

I write this to show later seekers the mind of one who has renounced the world.

Those who “cut through metal” will walk the same path as I.

50. The Small Divine Elixir (小神丹方)

Use true cinnabar three pounds, white honey six pounds.

Mix and sun-cook until it can be formed into pills.

Take ten pellets the size of hemp-seeds each morning.

Within a year, white hair blackens, lost teeth regrow, skin glows, and with long use even old men turn young, never dying.

51. The Small Elixir (小丹法)

Pound one pound cinnabar, mix with three pints bitter wine and two pints lacquer.

Warm gently until it can be rolled.

Take three pill-seeds twice a day.

After thirty days, internal ailments vanish and the Three Corpses depart.

After a hundred days, the body becomes hard and strong.

After a thousand, the Register of Death is erased, one’s form changes, light radiates, and at noon no shadow remains.

52. The Method of Liang Yi Zi (兩儀子餌黃金法)

Take pig-fat three pounds, bitter wine one pint, and five ounces of gold.

Boil in a clay furnace, immersing and removing the gold a hundred times.

Eat one pound - lifespan equals Heaven and Earth.

Half a pound - two thousand years.

Five ounces - twelve hundred years.

Even the smallest taste is effective.

Prepare it on auspicious days.

Do not transmit it to the unworthy, if you do, the medicine loses its power.

To purge the Three Corpses beforehand, take cinnabar.

Chapter 5 - On the Ultimate Principle (至理)

1. On Ultimate Principle

Baopuzi said:

The subtle and mysterious are difficult to recognize.

Thus many remain doubtful and confused.

My intelligence is not above others, I have merely grasped a small corner of the truth, like the crane that knows the hour of midnight, or the swallow that senses the day wu-si(Attuned to heavens cycles).

Each understands one thing, yet not all things.

Still, by observation and verification, I know that longevity can be attained, and that immortals are not born of special stock.

The highest mysteries of the Dao cannot be fully written, and what can be spoken of are but its nearness, not its essence.

In ancient times, Gengsang, Pianzhi, Wenzi, and Xiyan labored long and with hardship.

When they at last received the Great Secret, it was not without cause.

Every being with a round head and breath of life desires to live and fears to die.

Yet glory, wealth, and power seduce their will.

Fair faces and smooth skin bewitch their eyes.

Melodies and songs confuse their ears.

Love and hatred, gain and loss, disturb their spirit.

Fame and reputation bind their bodies.

All these come unbidden, learned without teaching.

Unless one is fated for immortality, able to discern the principles beyond the mundane, to see through the illusions of fame and form, and to lament how swiftly life passes like lightning, how can one bear to cut off indulgence, abandon pleasure, and pursue the distant, difficult art of the Great Work?

Existence is born of Non-Existence.

Form relies on spirit to stand.

What is is the palace of what is not.

Form is the dwelling of spirit.

A dike crumbles and water cannot stay(Loss of virtue, order or vitality).

A candle melts and fire cannot dwell.

When the body labors, the spirit scatters.

When the breath is exhausted, life ends.

When roots are drained though branches flourish, the green leaves depart from the tree.

When desire overcomes breath, the vital essence leaves the body.

The departed do not return, the decayed cannot regenerate.

Thus the wise lament deeply.

Why cherish jade and jewels, yet neglect the shadow of life?

Hence those who dwell in mountains and forests, who nurture their nature and transcend the vulgar, do not despise the world from arrogance, but because they have truly seen through it.

Therefore they dwell secluded, hiding their brilliance, restraining the eyes from colors, closing the ears to noise, washing the inner vision to clarity, embracing stillness and simplicity.

They breathe softly and refine gentleness, subdue agitation with quietude, cut away joy and sorrow, gain and loss, and dissolve greed's thick poisons.

They restrain speech at the axis of thought, listen within before hearing without, look inward before seeing form, nourish the spirit-root(Brain and spine assumably) in silent harmony, clear away attachment to things, and guard the natural principle with non-action.

Then they inhale the Precious Blossom and bathe in the Great Clarity, repelling the Five Planets from without, guarding the Nine Essences within.

They lock the Gate of Life with the Jade Key, bind the Pole Star to the Yellow Court, draw the Three Luminaries to the Hall of Brightness, and call the Primordial One to refine their form.

They collect spirit dew on the Golden Bridge, hold the pure and return the turbid, concentrate the clear spring in the cinnabar field, summon the spirit pearl to the Five Cities, while the jade cauldron steams below and the jeweled birds sing above.

The radiant fungus gleams, the celestial deer spits jade, clouds rise in blue billows to join the heavens, and the deep valley's water flows through mysterious channels.

Thus, walking upon the firmament and summoning the Six Spirits, they sit or lie within the Purple Chamber, chewing golden essence, swallowing autumn fungi and crimson blossoms, drinking the liquid pearls that fall like dew.

Hunger and thirst are cured and all diseases vanish.

Their soul and spirit are restrained and perfected.

Their bones are filled, their bodies become light.

They ride wind and cloud, travel through emptiness, and live eternally within the Infinite.

But:

Dust upon the beam thickens by inches, how can it be swept away in a moment?

A mountain stream that cuts through stone is not formed by sudden haste.

The misfortune is that those who hear do not believe.

Those who believe do not act and those who act do not persevere.

Those who succeed are hidden and rare.

Those who fail are many and visible.

The world sees only the failures and declares there is no true Way to immortality.

2. On the Nature of Lifespan and Nourishment

Baopuzi said:

If one guards tightly, water does not leak.

If oil is abundant, the lamp does not go out.

A keen sword stays sharp because it rarely cuts, an axe wears dull through daily use.

Snow lasts through summer if kept in shade, ice endures through heat when stored deep.

A single sheet of silk covers a mirror and prevents burning.

A straw roof saves plants from winter frost.

Clay and earth decay easily, yet when fired as pottery, they endure as long as Heaven and Earth.

Oak and elm rot swiftly, but when burned into charcoal, they last a thousand ages.

A well-fed pig lives long.

A fine horse dies young from labor.

Cold insects live longer in their proper climate.

Southern forests thrive in warmth, but when touched by cold wind they wither, and in spring's sun they bloom again.

Life and death differ though their stuff is one.

There is no fixed rule that autumn must reap or winter must store.

Human life is less bound to fate than plants to season, and so nourishment and healing must not be dismissed as small matters.

If warmth and care can sustain grass, why should proper cultivation not extend human years?

Yet common folk cling to narrow ways, calling immortality false,

and saying the teachings of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi are lies.

How pitiful!

The foolish will not trust even herbs or acupuncture so how could they trust the profound Dao?

They say:

“If doctors like Bian Que(扁鹊/秦越人, Waring state physician) or Chunyu Yi(淳于意, Western Han physican) could heal, why did they not live forever?

If rich men know medicine, why do they still die early?”

Such people miss the point.

To demand that every healer be deathless is like asking an ox to climb trees, or a horse to chase birds.

3. On the Power of Medicine

Baopuzi said:

There are small elixirs - the Soul-Summoning Pills, the Three Messengers, the Five Blossoms, the Eight Stones that can melt solid ice, float on water, banish demons and beasts, dissolve tumors in the organs, and revive those who have died suddenly.

If such common medicines can bring back the dead, why doubt that the supreme medicines can prevent death?

Did not the Yue healer revive the dead prince of Guo?

Did not the Hu physician restore life to Su Wu(蘇武) when his breath was gone?

Did not Chunyu Yi open skulls to cleanse the brain, and Yuanhua(元化/華佗) slit the belly to wash the stomach?

Did not Zhang Zhongjing(張仲景) insert red pills into the chest to heal mortal disease?

If such “lesser arts” can do this, how much more can the arts of the immortals!

Men die from desire’s exhaustion, from age and sickness, from poisons, from evil qi, from wind and cold.

Now, if one cultivates breathing, refines essence, moderates food and rest, and wards away all harm through purity, these six killers cannot touch him.

Physicians know pills that strengthen kidneys, powders that nourish the five vessels, decoctions that fill the bones, and soups that build the center.

Those who take them grow strong and full of life.

Fan Ah took the decoction of dogwood and wolfberry and lived two hundred years. Eyes and ears clear, still able to hold a needle to treat others.

This is historical fact, recorded by reliable writers.

4. On Proof by Example

It is also written:

Wu Pu learned the Five-Animal Exercises from Hua Tuo as a substitute for breathing practice, and lived over a hundred years.

If such shallow arts have this power, how much more the higher ones?

Tell a common man that licorice and knotweed relieve illness, that reeds and ferns kill worms, that peony eases pain, that cypress and ginger dispel damp. He still doubts you.

He would rather pray to gods and cast divinations than believe a doctor.

How then could he trust that the Golden Elixir grants transcendence

or that mushrooms of immortality prolong life?

Yet Zhang Liang, the strategist of Han, a man of unmatched intellect,

believed that immortality could be attained.

He said, “I will leave worldly affairs and follow Master Chisong(赤松子).”

He practiced fasting and breath-control for a year, seeking the way of flight.

But Empress Lü(吕后/雉) forced him to eat, thus his work was broken.

The Secret Record of Kong Anguo(孔安國) says that Zhang Liang received from the Yellow Stone Old Man the method of not dying, not only the art of war.

He later resumed practice in secret and transcended the world. People thought him dead, but he became immortal.

Similarly, Chancellor Zhang Cang(張蒼, A great scholar official, standarized the calender, weight and measures) practiced a minor art, drinking women's milk, and lived 180 years.

A small path, yet it tripled his life.

How much more the true great arts!

These things are written in the Han Histories, not empty words.

Editors note – "Similarly, Chancellor Zhang Cang practiced a minor art, drinking women's milk, and lived 180 years." - Finally, an immortality method for the common man.

5. On Breath and the Power of Qi

Baopuzi said:

Medicine is the root of long life, but when combined with breath practice, progress is swift.

Even without medicine, if one fully understands breath, one may live several hundred years.

Yet one must also know the art of sexual harmony for without mastery of yin and yang, excessive desire drains energy, and breathing practice fails.

All things depend on qi, from Heaven and Earth down to all creatures.

He who knows how to guide it inward nourishes life, and outwardly repels harm.

Yet common people use qi daily and do not know it.

The people of Wu and Yue have spells of breath-control that can prevent contagion in epidemics.

A man skilled in it can sleep beside the sick and not be infected.

They walk together in crowds, all without fear.

Thus qi can ward off Heaven's calamities.

If demons or mountain spirits attack a house, throwing stones or setting fires, the adept can forbid them with qi and they vanish instantly.

In forests full of snakes and poison, ordinary men are harmed, but the adept uses qi to guard the region for ten li so no beast dares strike.

With qi one can stop bleeding, mend bone and tendon, walk unharmed upon blades, or cure snakebite instantly.

In recent times, Zuo Ci(左慈, A fangshi) and Zhao Ming(趙明) used qi to stop water, making rivers flow backward.

They set fire upon thatched roofs and cooked food below, the straw did not burn.

They drove great nails into posts, then blew upon them and the nails flew out.

They forbade boiling water with qi, then plunged a hand into it and took coins unharmed.

They prevented freezing in winter, or stopped all cooking fires within a mile.

They silenced dogs so they could not bark.

When the general He fought mountain bandits, the enemy used breath spells.

The soldiers' swords could not draw, arrows turned back in flight.

But the general was wise.

He said, “They can forbid sharp blades, but not blunt wood.”.

So he armed 5,000 men with heavy white clubs.

The bandits laughed, unprepared and were beaten utterly.

The spell could not work on what had no edge.

Thus qi flows from the body and has power beyond imagination.

Why doubt that it can stop hunger, heal disease, and extend life?

Zhongchang Gong(中長公, Daoist immortal), a man of insight, wrote in Bright Sayings:

“By practicing breath, one need not eat or fall ill.

At first I doubted it, but when I tried, I found it true.

The method is simple, yet my mind, bound to worldly affairs, cannot perfect it.

Others surely suffer the same.”

Long ago there was a sage who knew the art of not dying.

The King of Yan sent a man to learn, but before mastery, the teacher died.

The king wished to execute the messenger, but a minister said:

“What we fear most is death, what we value most is life.

If the man could not preserve his own life, how could he teach our lord not to die?”

The king relented.

Yet if the teacher truly knew the breath-art I have spoken of, his death was not from ignorance.

He merely could not cast off worldly attachments.

Thus knowledge alone is useless without the will to practice.

There was once a man of Mi County named Bu Cheng.

He cultivated the Dao for many years.

One day he bade farewell to his family, walked out, slowly rising higher with each step, until he entered the clouds and was no longer seen.

This is called “light ascension in broad daylight,” the highest form of immortality.

The sages Chen Yuanfang(陳元方) and Han Yuanchang(韓元長), scholars of Yingchuan, believed in immortality because they witnessed it.

For Bu Cheng(卜成), their neighbor, truly ascended to Heaven before their eyes.

Thus the reality of immortals is beyond dispute.

Chapter 6 - Subtle Meanings (微旨)

1. Subtle Meaning 1

Baopuzi said:

“When people are of one accord, agreement needs no words.

But when paths differ, even sincere speech is doubted.

In ordinary matters close at hand and in choices as trivial as black and whitem people still err in judgment.

How much more when one speaks of what lies beyond the human world, of the utmost subtlety of the Dao?

The multitude laughs at it as this has always been so.

Where clarity reaches, even the darkness of night or the hair-fine edge of things can be seen.

But where the light does not reach, even the brilliance of sun and moon and the towering heights of Tai or Song remain unseen.

The Yellow Emperor and Laozi, sages of the Hidden Dao, perceived what others could not.

They received immortal scriptures from divine beings, cast off the dust of the world, and ascended to the far beyond.

No gold or stone can match their endurance, no turtle or crane their lifespan.

Out of pity for seekers without teachers, they left written methods, bright and clear.

Small practice yields small result, great practice great proof.

Yet shallow men cling to what they know.

They savor bitter herbs but never taste honey.

They are drunk on thin gruel and cannot value fine wine.

They know life is good but not that it can be nourished.

They fear death but do not believe it can be avoided.

They know excess food breeds illness, yet will not restrain their mouths.

They know lust drains the body, yet cannot cut off desire.

Though I tell them immortality can be attained, how can they believe me?"

2. Subtle Meaning II

Someone challenged:

"You are not of wondrous appearance or long years, you have not personally seen an immortal, nor heard their words.

How can you know that long life may be gained and cultivation verified?

If your heart perceives the mysterious, I dare not deny it.

But without proof, your claims seem like a poor man boasting of the riches of Tao Zhu(陶朱/范蠡, Statesmen and strategist of the Spring and Autumn period).”

Baopuzi replied:

“A tiny shrimp swimming in a puddle thinks there are no four seas.

A grub writhing in a fruit pit believes the world ends there.

Tell them of oceans and they think it empty talk.

If my eyes were square and my ears reached the crown of my head, riding dragons and driving clouds, would you then question me?

You would call me a god, not a man who learned through study.

I only wish to guide those who can sense beforehand.

How could I force all to believe?

If every household had an immortal, shoulder to shoulder in the streets, even the blind would not doubt.

But when the adept’s Way is accomplished, he walks the blue heavens and roams the purple pole.

Unless one’s spirit is attuned, one cannot see or hear him.

The world trusts its own short sight, believing its little measure to be perfect.

It is amazed at what is rare and ignorant of what is vast.

This blindness has long existed, not just today.”

3. Subtle Meaning III

Someone asked:

“I no longer doubt the existence of immortals, but fear I cannot reach it.

Is there some essential method that can be practiced alone?”

Baopuzi said:

“In studying the Dao, begin shallow and advance deep, from easy to hard.

If the will is firm, nothing is impossible.

If doubt arises, all fails.

Roots must pierce the earth before branches touch the sky.

Springs must deepen before rivers flow far.

Without hidden virtue one cannot move spirits.

Without sincerity one cannot find true teachers.

Without labor one cannot pass great trials.

And without meeting an enlightened master, the essential path cannot be known.

The Nine Elixirs and Gold-Liquid are the sovereign means of immortality, but costly and difficult to prepare.

The urgent task is to guard the essence and treasure the breath.

Use minor medicines to extend life and learn near arts to ward off evil.

Thus may one gradually approach the subtle.”

4. Subtle Meaning IV

Someone said:

“The arts are many and hard to master.

Aside from the Golden Elixir, which single path is best?”

Baopuzi said:

“If the highest cannot yet be reached, one must still know the lesser arts, for together they sustain long life, just as a ruler governs with law, ritual, and arms or a craftsman makes a chariot with axle, hub, and spokes.

Inner arts cultivate form and spirit to heal and prolong.

Outer arts repel demons and disasters.

To rely on one art alone is like expecting a single string to play five tones, or one armor plate to stop every blade.

Some claim only sexual arts save the body, others only breath practice, or gymnastics, or herbs.

Because of such one-sidedness, few succeed.

Those of shallow sight learn one trick and think it enough, or flit from method to method, wasting time.

Some, dull in nature, rush into deep mountains without skill, stung by poison or eaten by beasts, dying in valleys. Pitiful indeed.

Choosing the right teacher is more vital than blind toil.

If a teacher knows little or teaches half, saying ‘The Dao needs no many arts,’ he misleads disciples.

‘The Dao needs no many arts’ applies only to those who already hold the supreme Elixir.

For others, a wide foundation is necessary.

Even a householder who lacks gold must still plant many grains to eat.

So too, one must learn to stop hunger, avert weapons, repel poison, heal sickness, walk among beasts and water unharmed, escape epidemics, hide from danger. These are minor arts, yet essential.

How much more should one learn beyond them!”

5. Subtle Meaning V - On Taboos and Virtue

Someone asked:

“What are the main taboos for cultivating longevity?”

Baopuzi said:

“The greatest taboo is harming or exhausting life.

The Book of Changes(易經/周易), the Scripture of Red Pine(赤松經), and the River Chart of Destiny(河圖命經 / 河圖) all teach that Heaven has spirits who record transgressions.

According to their weight, they subtract days from a man’s span.

When the tally is gone, he dies.

Within us dwell the Three Corpses - unseen spirits who crave our death, so that they may roam as ghosts and feast on our offerings.

Each gengshen day they ascend to report our sins to the Lord of Fate.

On the last night of the month the Kitchen God also reports them.

Major faults cut off three hundred days, minor ones three.

Whether or not one believes the details, the moral is clear: Heaven and Earth surely reward good and punish evil.

Therefore, all Daoist precepts command that seekers of long life must accumulate virtue and practice compassion.

Be kind to all beings, extend mercy even to insects, rejoice in others' good, pity their suffering, aid the poor, rescue the distressed, never harm life with hand or tongue, see others' gain as your own, others' loss as your own, avoid pride and envy, flattery and deceit.

Such a one gains Heaven's favor.

His works succeed, his quest for immortality has hope.

But those who hate good and delight in killing, whose words and hearts diverge, who oppress the weak, cheat the strong, break faith, exploit office, corrupt judgment, injure, steal, deceive, destroy families, take others' property, or mock the sacred.

These shorten their lives and bring ruin to their descendants.

Even the mere thought of evil shortens the count.

Evil deeds that harm others erase great cycles.

Only repentance and counter-virtue can atone.

Rescue life to repay killing.

Give wealth to balance theft.

Recommend the worthy to offset injustice.

Do double good to cancel the wrong, then misfortune turns to blessing.

Heaven is high yet hears the lowly.

No act escapes its mirror.

Constant goodness surely brings reward.

The virtuous live long, the corrupt perish early.

Such is the law of the Dao."

Editors note - Chinese timekeeping uses the sexagenary cycle (六十甲子) — a repeating sequence of 60 combinations of:

Ten Heavenly Stems (天干): 甲 乙 丙 丁 戊 己 庚 辛 壬 癸

Twelve Earthly Branches (地支): 子 丑 寅 卯 辰 巳 午 未 申 酉 戌 亥
Day 1 would be 甲 子 2 is 乙 丑, etc.

Gengshan is 庚申. Double metal. Heavy with "karma".

6. Subtle Meaning VI - On Protection from Peril

Someone asked:

"In these latter days the world is unsafe, thieves abound.

How may I avoid sudden harm?"

Baopuzi said:

“On the day called Holding the Sun, take topsoil from the Six Gui days, mix with the fragrant herb hundred-leaf and smear a foot-square patch upon your gate. Thieves will not come.

Or take soil from the southern city gate, from the ‘year-breaking’ and ‘month-establishing’ days, mold it with water and place it on the Vermilion Bird quarter of your dwelling. It subdues thieves.

If danger presses, enter the ‘living earth’ of the place and remain there.

No harm will touch you.

Every region, every county, every house has its ‘living earth’ spot.”

Editor note – Azure dragon – Wood/East, Vermillion bird – Fire/South, White tiger – Metal/West, Black Tortoise – Water/North.

7. Subtle Meaning VII

Someone asked:

“But in a single room, can there truly be such a ‘living earth’?”

Baopuzi said:

“The classic says,‘In utmost peril, hide beneath the carriage rail.’

If a carriage contains a safe point, why not a room?”

8. Subtle Meaning VIII — On the Two Mountains

Someone asked:

“I have heard that to seek life one must know the Two Mountains.

Where are these?”

Baopuzi said:

“They are not Hua or Huo, not Song or Tai.

The first is the Great Origin Mountain.

It is neither in Heaven nor on Earth, neither floating nor sunken.

Its cliffs are vast and cloud-bound.

Its air is harmonious and bright.

In it flows the Jade Well of clear depth, with endless irrigation and the offices of a hundred and twenty spirits.

There grow ten thousand stalks of black fungus and crimson trees of gem.

Its treasures gleam gold and jade.

Sweet springs pour from its corners.

Those who drink of them regain their youth.

Cultivate there, and the pine will be your peer.

This is the first mountain.

The second is the Long Valley Mountain.

Remote and high, its dark vapors float, jade mist drifts, golden pools and purple chambers lie within.

Fools who wander there die.

The adept ascends unharmed, gathering yellow essence and flying to Heaven.

These are the Two Mountains.

Guard their secret well.”

The questioner said:

“Then tell me how a True Person guards body and refines form.”

Baopuzi replied:

“A deep question!

When sun and moon meet beneath the first blue sky, their halves unite as one.

From the Jade Pool they enter the Golden Chamber, round as a pellet, yellow as an orange, sweet as honey. Seize it and never lose it.

Once gone it never returns.

When the body is near extinction, a pure white breath rises through the triple passes, and a blazing cinnabar radiance appears unmatched within.

Fix it at the Gate of Life and form will not perish.

Mysterious indeed! Hard to explain.

This is the oral secret of the masters.

He who knows it fears neither demons nor blades.”

9. Subtle Meaning IX On the Chamber Arts

Someone asked:

“I have heard that mastery of the chamber arts (sexual alchemy) alone can lead to immortality, and also avert disaster, erase sin, bring fortune, promotion, and profit. Is this true?”

Baopuzi said:

“These are exaggerations and falsehoods, embellished by charlatans seeking disciples and wealth.

The art of yin and yang can at most heal minor illness and prevent depletion. It cannot by itself confer immortality or turn misfortune to blessing.

A man cannot abstain entirely from intercourse without harm, yet indulgence destroys life.

He who knows the art can use it to restore the brain’s essence, redden the bowels, draw the jade liquid from the golden pool, and join the three and five energies upon the shining bridge.

Thus the aged retain beauty and fulfill their natural span.

But the vulgar, hearing that the Yellow Emperor rose to Heaven with twelve hundred maidens, think that sex alone made him immortal.

They do not know he first refined the Nine Elixirs at Mount Jing, then rode a dragon to Heaven.

Without the medicines, even thousands of women avail nothing.

Hence the ancients, fearing men’s indulgence, spoke of this art attractively, but it must not be taken literally.

Water and fire kill and also give life, so too with yin and yang, all lies in skillful use.

Those who know the method may take many partners safely.

Those who do not may die from one.

Pengzu's method is the most essential.

Other writings are laborious and less effective.

Few can practice them.

Their oral instructions number but a few thousand words.

He who knows not this, though he swallow a hundred medicines, cannot achieve long life."

Chapter 7 - Refuting Doubts (塞難)

1. Refuting Doubts I

Someone said:

“The august vault of Heaven is supremely divine, surely it grants life impartially.

Why then do mere mortals like Qiao Song enjoy unending life, while sages like Zhou and Confucius perish like all men?”

Baopuzi replied:

“The length of life depends on one’s destined alignment.

When the embryo forms, each person receives the influence of certain stars.

Heaven itself is wuwei - non-interfering, letting things follow their own nature, without favoritism or bias.

If one’s fate belongs to a ‘life star,’ that person will naturally love the immortal path, and whoever truly loves the Way of Immortality will inevitably obtain it.

If one’s fate belongs to a ‘death star,’ that person will not believe in immortality, and disbelief prevents cultivation.

Thus liking or disliking, fortune or misfortune, are determined by the allotment of vital qi, not by Heaven’s personal will.

It is like metal and stone in the furnace. Though both are shaped by fire, some emerge sharp, others dull.

Clay is baked in the same kiln, yet some vessels are straight, some crooked.

They share the same fire, but the outcome depends on the material, not the furnace itself."

2. Refuting Doubts II

Someone argued:

"A skilled craftsman shapes all things by his hand.

How can the divine Heaven, supreme in power, not also determine each person's fate?

You claim that life and destiny arise from mere coincidence, I find this hard to believe."

Baopuzi replied:

"When chaos first divided, the clear rose and the turbid sank. Some moved upward, others downward.

Even Heaven and Earth themselves do not know why this was so.

All beings respond to the qi they receive. This is nature itself.

Heaven and Earth are but two among the myriad things.

They differ only in size and precedence.

Because Heaven and Earth are great, they make other things seem small.

Because things are small, they reveal Heaven and Earth as vast.

The back and belly enclose the organs, yet the organs are not made by the back and belly.

The skin wraps the blood, yet the skin does not create the blood.

Heaven and Earth contain all beings, but they do not manufacture them.

Grass and trees grow because of mountains and forests, but mountains and forests do nothing to create them.

Fish are born in water, but water does not consciously make them.

Because people see Heaven and Earth as great and beings as small, they imagine Heaven and Earth are the parents of all.

But consider: lice are born upon my body, yet did I create them?

They cannot live without me, but I am not their father; they are not my sons.

Gnats are bred in vinegar, fungus grows in rot, moss sprouts from stone, yet none of these hosts intend to make them.

So with all things within Heaven and Earth - there is no difference.

Heaven has sun, moon, cold, and heat. Humans have sight, breath, and pulse.

If we reason from near to far, just as a man cannot know the cause of his own aches and aging, so Heaven cannot know the causes of its eclipses and seasons.

A man cannot keep his eyes and ears ever sharp, so Heaven cannot prevent the waning of sun and moon.

Thus great longevity does not depend on Heaven and Earth.

Being or not being an immortal does not lie in their decree.

Fathers and mothers give us form and breath, yet cannot ensure beauty, strength, or wisdom.

Some children are tall and fair, others short and lame.

Some blind, some dull, though all have the same parents.

Parents cannot make us eternally strong or free from sickness.

How much less can Heaven and Earth, vast and remote, govern every detail of human life?

Even I myself cannot keep my own body from aging.

How could Heaven preserve me forever?

Therefore, those who grant the qi and shape our birth, parents,

have no power to extend our span.

How could Heaven or Earth have such power?

If Heaven made all beings deliberately, then all should be perfect, none ugly, none evil, none unfortunate.

Yet life is uneven, the righteous die young, and villains live long.

Hence we see: Heaven acts without will."

3. Refuting Doubts III

Someone said:

“Confucius declared, ‘Since ancient times, all men must die.’

Laozi said, ‘The immortal Way can be learned.’

Confucius’ words are tested and true;

the Daoist claims seem wild and unproven.”

Baopuzi replied:

“Confucius was the sage of the Confucians, Laozi, the sage who attained the Dao.

Confucian teaching is near and visible thus many follow it.

The Dao is distant and subtle thus few understand.

The Dao is the source of all streams;

Confucianism is but one channel of the great flow.

Before the Three Sovereigns, the world was governed by the Dao;

since the Emperors onward, it has been ruled by Confucian rites.

Everyone knows to praise the ancient simplicity and condemn the decadence of later ages.

Why then honor Confucius but despise Laozi?

It is like admiring the blossoms and forgetting the root, or loving a jade disk while hating the mountain that bore it.

Nourishing life is but a remnant of the Dao.

Rites and music are the tail end of Confucianism.

We honor the Confucian because he reforms manners and customs, not merely for bowing and ceremony.

We revere the Dao because it transforms all things without words, not merely for prolonging life.

If there is truly an order of precedence, neither should be rejected.

Confucius himself revered Laozi, sought to learn from him, and said that he knew birds and beasts but not the dragon, comparing Laozi to the dragon that soars beyond form.

This was genuine admiration, not idle flattery."

4. Refuting Doubts IV

Someone asked:

"Confucius met Laozi yet did not study the Dao from him. Why?"

Baopuzi said:

"This proves that each person has his innate nature and calling.

Confucius knew Laozi's teaching was lofty, but he could not comprehend its depth in emptiness and stillness.

His questions concerned worldly order, not transcendence.

He was diligent in reforming society, but not inclined to seclusion and self-cultivation.

Thus Laozi warned him:

'The great merchant hides his wealth as if empty, the true gentleman seems dull.

Abandon your pride and desire, your pose and indulgent will, they bring no benefit to your body.'

This shows that Confucius, though saintly in worldly affairs, was not free from the passions of the common heart.

He longed to aid the age, to restore the lost order, lamented the phoenix's silence and the gourd's emptiness.

How could such a man abandon duty for meditation?"

5. Refuting Doubts V - On Difficulty and Ease

Someone asked:

"Between Confucianism and the Dao, which is easier?"

Baopuzi replied:

"The Confucian path is the hardest among the easy, the Daoist path is the easiest among the hard.

To abandon friends and kin, renounce rank and wealth, quiet the senses, remain unmoved by slander or praise, content in poverty, unashamed of obscurity - this is the difficulty of the Daoist path.

Yet once entered, it is easy.

No need for constant study, no toil of calculation, no anxious striving for reputation.

When vexations cease, harmony increases.

With wuwei, the mind is tranquil and fearless, this is its ease.

The Confucian path seems easy but is hard.

One must study the Six Classics, balance ritual and timing, speak without error, act as a model for the world.

Every word is judged, every gesture weighed.

This is truly difficult.

Thus I left the difficult for the easy.

The world mocks me for it. So be it.

Those who share my mind may come in later ages."

6. Refuting Doubts VI

Someone said:

"I have met many great scholars and thinkers who have exhausted all inquiries into principle and existence, yet none have spoken of extending life or attaining immortality.

You, sir, are neither brighter than the sun nor wiser than all men, how can you claim such a path exists?"

Baopuzi said:

"I am but a common man, how could I claim supreme insight?

Yet by examining the hidden through the evident, testing the small to know the great, I have seen proofs enough to trust the unseen.

Those who deny immortality rely on bookish cleverness and narrow sight.

They think that if they cannot see it, it must not exist, just as one who measures a deep well with a short rope declares there is no water when the rope runs out.

Some hear a strange sound and call it thunder in winter.

Some see clouds move west and think the moon flies east.

They are told otherwise, but never believe.

Such is the pride of the shallow learned.

Our senses often err, the eye sees wrongly, the ear mishears.

How then can the heart, which perceives what has no form or sound, be wholly reliable?

To judge the hidden by such a heart and call the immortal path false, is that not blindness?”

7. Refuting Doubts VII - On the Inevitability of Disbelief

Baopuzi said:

“Beauty and ugliness are fixed, yet tastes differ. Thus two eyes never see alike.

Elegant or vulgar tones are distinct, yet preferences vary. Thus two ears never hear the same.

Truth and falsehood have substance, yet hearts diverge. Thus two minds never agree.

Some take foul for pure, loss for gain, death for life.

If even such obvious things cannot be agreed upon, how could all believe in immortality?

If everyone understood, what worth would the sages have?

To wait for the vulgar to cease their noisy doubts is to wait for the Yellow River to turn clear and that will be long indeed.

Therefore I cannot be silent.

I speak in hope of reaching those few who are capable of ascent or descent, who can be drawn toward understanding.

Those fixed in ignorance, even the ancients could not move them.

The difficulty of explaining the ultimate truth and the disbelief in immortality are both ancient, not born today.

The highest beings know it naturally.

Next come those who understand after being taught.

Ss for those who laugh when they hear, they are countless.

Perhaps I shall be scorned or condemned for these words.

Yet truth must be spoken.

Just as bright sun cannot revive rotten wood, and the sage cannot transform the obstinately deluded, so my words may fall useless on many.

Fine hats are not sold among barbarians, red shoes not worn among those who go barefoot.

How can one force them?

To call jade a stone is not because jade is false, but because one has not yet met a master like Bian He(卞和) to discern it.

To call a dragon a snake is not because dragons lack divinity, but because one needs a wise eye to recognize them.

The Dao cannot be added to nor diminished.

True virtue does not change with praise or blame.

If others insist there are no immortals, and I insist there are, the more we argue, the deeper their stubbornness grows.

Why prolong the contention?

It is like trying to loosen a chain by pulling both ends.”

Chapter 8 - Clarifying Obstructions (釋滯)

1 Clarifying Obstructions I

Someone asked:

“The human path has many branches, and the immortal Way is the hardest of all.

If one does not abandon other duties, how can both be done?

What of the arts and letters, the joys and sorrows of life, the duties of ruler and minister, how can these be set aside?”

Baopuzi replied:

“The essential Way is not cumbersome, only few truly hold to it.

The trouble lies not in the Way’s difficulty, but in people’s wavering faith and weak resolve.

If will is firm and trust steadfast, what need is there to fear the ruin of human order?

Those of great capacity can combine both paths without difficulty.

Inwardly they treasure the arts of nourishing life, outwardly they harmonize with the world’s light.

They perfect their own being and so prolong their span.

They govern others and so bring peace to the realm.

They may instruct the common folk with the Six Classics, yet teach close disciples the secret arts.

If they wish to linger among men, they pause to aid the age.

If they wish to ascend, they rise through the clouds.

These are the highest adepts.

Those who feel their strength insufficient and withdraw from the world to devote themselves solely to the Dao and virtue, these are next.

Did not the Yellow Emperor, burdened with the realm, still ascend at Dinghu Lake?

Pengzu served as a grand officer for eight centuries before departing west.

Laozi was Keeper of the Archives, Ning Feng, Director of Ceramics, Fang Huai, Gate warden, Lü Wang, Grand Master;

Qiu Sheng served under Yin, Ma Dan under Jin, Fan Gong ruled Yue and sailed the sea.

Qin Gao held court at Song, Chang Sheng humbled himself to drive a chariot, Zhuang Gong concealed his powers as a petty clerk.

Many of the ancients gained the Dao while still aiding the world.

They had strength enough for both.

One need not hide in mountains and abandon all civic life to achieve the Way.

Yet there are those whose hearts delight in stillness, whose natures dislike noise and contention, they find joy in ease, distress in honors.

Clad in coarse cloth, eating herbs, tilling the soil, they savor their threefold happiness, careless of fame and unafraid of death.

They refuse gold and rank, preferring simplicity.

Even without special practice, they already live so.

How much more, if they also know the Way of the immortals!

Each follows his own bent, it cannot be judged by one rule."

Baopuzi added:

"The world prizes a single apt word above gold, for a saying may turn states and lives.

How much more, then, a word that imparts the secret of long life, a formula for immortality.

Its worth exceeds a thousand gold pieces.

If one dying of illness were restored by medicine, all would call it a great boon.

But if by the immortal scriptures and the elixirs of gold and jade all under Heaven might be freed from death. Is not that grace beyond measure?

Yet few recognize the virtue of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, and call their words absurd. How lamentable indeed."

2 Clarifying Obstructions II - On Essentials of Practice

Baopuzi said:

"To seek immortality, one must grasp only the essentials:

Guarding the essence (jing), circulating the breath (qi), and taking the Great Medicine.

A single perfected elixir suffices, no need for many.

But each of these three has depths and subtleties.

Without an enlightened master and long diligence, they cannot be known in haste.

There are numerous methods of breath cultivation, over a hundred formulas of the chamber arts, and nearly a thousand prescriptions of alchemical medicine.

Teachers always begin with the easy.

Only after the pupil's will proves firm do they reveal the core.

On breath practice:

It may cure a hundred diseases, protect one in plague, subdue snakes and tigers, stop bleeding wounds, let one dwell beneath or walk upon water, avert hunger and thirst, and prolong life.

Its supreme secret is embryonic breathing (taixi): to breathe as in the womb, without using nose or mouth.

Then the Way is complete.

The beginner draws breath softly through the nose and holds it, counting in the heart to 120, then releases it faintly through the mouth.

Inhalation and exhalation should be silent, in always exceeding out.

A down feather placed before the lips should not stir(Metaphor to breathe subtly/gently).

Gradually increase the count to 1000.

Then even the aged grow youthful again.

Practice only during hours of living qi, from midnight to noon are the six "living" periods.

From noon to midnight are six "dead" periods, when breath work has no gain.

Thus it is said: 'The immortals feed upon six qi.'.

Masters can blow upon water to make it flow backward, on fire to extinguish it, on beasts to make them crouch, on snakes to coil motionless.

They blow upon wounds to stop blood, upon the poisoned from afar to heal them instantly. The left hand for men, the right for women.

Even from a hundred li away the patient recovers.

If stricken by sudden evil, swallow the breath three times nine.

The cure is immediate.

But few succeed, for human nature is restless, and cannot abide in stillness.

Excess food and rich flavors disturb the qi, anger scatters it.

Thus rare are those who persevere.

My own fore-ancestor, the Immortal Xian Gong, when drunk or in the heat of summer, would dive to the bottom of a deep pool and remain a day.

This was by mastering the sealed breath of embryonic stillness.

On the chamber arts:

Of the many lineages, some repair depletion, some heal disease, some gather yin to nourish yang, some prolong years.

Their main secret is the “return of essence to the brain.”.

This teaching was orally transmitted by True Men, never written.

Without it, even taking famous elixirs brings no immortality.

Yet one must not abstain utterly from intercourse.

When yin and yang do not meet, blockage and illness arise.

Thus the resentful and celibate fall sick and die young.

But indulgence also shortens life.

Only the harmonious mean preserves vitality.

Without the oral formulas, none who attempt it avoid harm.

Ancient masters like Xuansu, Zidu, Rongcheng, and Pengzu recorded only rough outlines.

The true essentials were never written.

Seekers of immortality must labor to find them.

I record what I learned from my master Zheng Jun(鄭君) to confirm the words for future believers. This is not conjecture.

Even I have not yet fully mastered the art.

Some minor Daoists cling only to the sexual method and neglect the Great Elixir, that is the height of folly."

3 Clarifying Obstructions III - On False Texts and Empty Learning

Baopuzi said:

"Books that truly come from the Yellow Emperor and Laozi are few.

Later enthusiasts added their own notions, until the scrolls piled up like mountains.

The ancients were plain and brief.

Their writings touch only lightly on the laws of things, lacking demonstration and clarity.

Hence they omit essentials, are hard to grasp, and cannot open the understanding or inspire beginners.

One may recite them ten thousand times and gain nothing.

Therefore, study widely but choose carefully.

Keep only what is sound, the rest is not worth pursuing.

Lesser students fail to distinguish depth from shallowness.

Seeing a book labeled ‘Daoist,’ they copy volumes by the basketful, searching within for truth, like hunting phoenix eggs in a swallow’s nest, or fishing for eels in a dry well.

However great their labor, it brings no use. Time is wasted, strength exhausted, and not an ounce of gain.

They neglect worldly duties yet gain no longevity, and people point to them saying, ‘See, those who study the Dao work so hard and never transcend. Therefore there is no immortality.’

They do not know that such seekers are like men who gaze at the river longing for fish but have no net.

Not that the river lacks fish.

Even the Dao De Jing, though from Laozi,

speaks only in broad and general terms.

He rarely states a matter from beginning to end.

There is meaning to inherit, but not the complete method.

To recite it blindly without grasping the essentials is futile.

As for Wenzi, Zhuangzi, Guanzi, and Yin Xi, their writings, though founded on the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, expand only the grand themes, never the decisive words.

Some even proclaim that life and death are equal, and that dying is rest.

Thus they have strayed a billion li from the immortal Way.

Their parables contain bits of truth, useful for small occasions, but in the end, flatterers and rogues have made the teachings of Lao and Zhuang a refuge for hypocrisy.

How pitiable!”

4 Clarifying Obstructions IV - On Withdrawing from Office

Someone said:

“The enlightened ruler values the virtuous above all.

If seekers of immortality refuse office, and all cultivate the Dao,

who will serve the state?”

Baopuzi replied:

“To withdraw from a wise sovereign is what made Chao Fu and Xu You noble;

to flee the world in a golden age is what made Zhuang Bo esteemed.

When the Yellow Emperor ruled, even the perfect order of Dinghu did not draw Guangcheng to court.

When Yao possessed the world, Wochuan did not serve him, yet virtue and governance were not impaired.

Tang raised Heaven’s Mandate, yet Wu Guang drowned himself.

Zhou conquered Shang, yet Bo Yi and Shu Qi starved on the Western Mountain.

Qi Huan flourished, yet Shao Ji slept peacefully in his alley.

Wei Wen reigned, yet Qian Mu loosed his hair by the western river.

The Four Elders hid their wings in Shangluo, and still the Han had no lack of worthies.

Zhou Dang Lin dwelt in the woods, and Guangwu's justice was undiminished.

Rank and wealth cannot move such hearts.

They wash their tassels in the blue stream, build halls from fragrant forest, roofs from lofty peaks, beds from green orchids, curtains from leaves.

Coarse garments replace brocade, bracken and beans replace rich feasts.

They plow to eat and weave to clothe.

Even to abandon family and clan, cast aside glory as dust, walk alone through the peaks, turn hearing inward to silence, gazing into the realm of no-form.

How many in all the eight directions can do so?

And yet you fear the ruler will lack ministers?

Is that not needless worry?"

5 Clarifying Obstructions V - On Loyalty and Reclusion

Someone said:

"Seekers of immortality purify themselves and ignore disorder, turn their backs on the ruler.

Is this not disloyalty? Will they not be punished?"

Baopuzi replied:

“Shihu, Shan Juan, and Zhou Zi were all men of great talent who withdrew to nourish their vast spirit.

Their rising and sinking harmed no order of the world.

Moreover, not all Daoists possess the ability for government.

Their absence adds no dust to the world.

Their presence removes no beam from the house.

Today the empire is full of officials, there is no lack of men.

In ancient times, Zi Jin resigned the post of food-taster and abandoned the succession, yet King Ling did not call him unfilial.

Yin Sheng cast off his sash and seal, and Zhou did not call him disloyal.

For their hearts were pure, not scorning the ruler but following another love.

A wise sovereign embraces all hearts, knowing that dispositions differ.

He neither forces nor forbids, thus glory expands above and joy is complete below.

When peace returns and arms are laid down, even generals retire.

Why begrudge the few who seek the Dao?

Their art lies in quiet thought and few desires.

Their aim, to preserve body and lengthen life.

They are not rebels nor harm to custom.

What guilt have they?

The vast peaks and the wide sea are not lessened by handfuls of dust or drops of water.

So too, among all mankind, a few immortals do no injury to the realm."

6 Clarifying Obstructions VI - On the Silence of the Classics

Someone said:

"If the immortal path truly exists, why is it not in the Five Classics?

Why did Zhou and Confucius not speak of it?

If they knew but did not practice, it cannot be real.

If they did not know, they cannot be saints."

Baopuzi replied:

"This question I have already discussed elsewhere.

You are like a man carrying a basin on his head, unable to see the shining constellations above, or standing by a river, yet ignorant of its deep currents.

The Five Classics omit countless things.

Zhou and Confucius left many unspoken.

Let me tell you a fraction.

Heaven and Earth are the greatest of beings.

The Nine Sages composed the Book of Changes to cover yin and yang, yet ask the best diviners:

What is the measure of Heaven?

How wide the seas, how far the universe?

What holds up the heavens, what anchors the earth?

Why do sun and moon wax and wane, the five planets move, the stars rise and set, the comets and omens appear?

None of this is explained by the Changes.

Ask the masters of Spring and Autumn, Poems, Documents, and Rites. They cannot answer either.

They admit these are outside the Classics, recorded only by Gan De, Shi Shen, Hai Zhong, and others.

Then ask: ‘Are those books canonical?’ They will say no.

‘Were those men sages?’ No, again.

Yet Heaven spreads above and Earth lies beneath, and though the Classics omit such things, they still exist.

Can one therefore call them false?

If the visible world still contains mysteries beyond the Classics, how much more the subtle and profound!

You believe in tales of strange lands and spirits.

The one-eyed tribes, the serpent-men, stones that speak, trees that walk, birds that become men, and cloth that resists fire.

All absent from the Five Classics, yet you do not call them lies.

Why then deny the Way of Immortality?

Southern men dive into pillars and emerge unharmed.

Archers draw bows with their elbows in water.

Li Zhu could see a hair at a hundred paces.

Yu Ren revived the dead with a needle.

Song Gong carved leaves into lifelike images.

Mo Di made wooden birds that flew.

None of these were done by Zhou or Confucius.

Shall we say they never occurred?

If sages have limits, there is no shame that they did not become immortals.

That they were saints in virtue does not require them to master all arts.

They accepted birth and death as natural, therefore they did not seek to transcend.

Why find fault in that?”

Chapter 9 - On the Meaning of the Dao (道意)

1. On the Nature of the Dao

Baopuzi said:

“The Dao encompasses Heaven and Earth, containing Qian and Kun. Its root has no name.

Speak of it as non-being, and even shadows and echoes seem ‘existent’ beside it,

Speak of it as being, and the ten thousand things are still ‘non-being’ by comparison.

Even Lishu, master of calculation, cannot measure its scope;

Even Li Zhu, whose eyes pierced the smallest things, cannot discern its subtle outline.

Wu Zha and Jin Ye, masters of sound, could exhaust their hearing and yet not trace its tones within the depths of mystery.

Swiftest beasts, boars or deer could not pursue its signs beyond the bounds of the cosmos.

If spoken of as near, it permeates even an autumn hair and yet has surplus.

If spoken of as far, it fills the great void and is still not enough.

It is the sound behind all sounds, the form of all forms, the shadow of all shadows.

The square grasps it as stillness, the round grasps it as movement.

Those who descend grasp it by bowing.

Those who ascend grasp it by looking up.

To give it any name is already to lose its truth.

How much further are we from it when we divide and analyze it into a thousand doctrines and ten thousand schools!

By multiplying names without end, we stray farther and farther from the Dao itself."

2. The Error of Seeking Outside

"The common people," he continued, "cannot recognize the original beginning of the Dao.

They cling instead to its scattered, turbid end.

If one can remain pure, tranquil, and content, unstained and unmoved.

If one nourishes the heart by absence of desire and preserves the spirit through simplicity and integrity.

If one sweeps away enticements and rectifies intention, casts off difficult ambitions and harmful passions, reduces joy and anger, extinguishes love and hatred.

Then blessings come uninvited, and misfortunes depart unbanished.

Why?

Because fate lies within, not outside.

The Dao is present here, not dependent there.

But the common man cannot guard the True(真).

He lacks restraint, and lets the tastes of pleasure and greed shake him.

His heart gallops after externals, his mind overflows into things.

Enticed by what is desirable, he extinguishes the heavenly principle.

Deluded by sights and sounds, he loses his unity.

Thus the heart becomes a prisoner of extravagance, the emotions churn like waves, and disasters arise from excess.

Then he sacrifices fat beasts, pours out sweet wine, beats drums and blows horns, kneels and prostrates, sits long in empty prayer, begging for fortune, fearing calamity, yet dies unawakened.

Is this not pitiable?

His vital spirit is troubled by cares, his body's essence is wasted by toil.

He scorches his vitality, carves away his heavenly harmony.

He labors beyond his limit, then prays for life while exhausting life itself.

He lies in wind and dampness, then apologizes to the spirits.

He overeats and overdrinks, then blames demons for his sickness.

How can Heaven and Earth rescue such a one?

What can slaughtered beasts and overflowing sacrifices avail him?

Blessing cannot be begged by reverence.

Disaster cannot be driven off by prayer.

If offerings could truly extend life, then the rich would never die young, and the noble would know no sickness.

The spirits do not partake in alien rites, the ghosts do not feed on licentious sacrifice.

The shanty of a servant cannot summon the chariot of a prince, nor the hut of a peasant move the six-horsed team of the great.

How much less can mortal wine and flesh move the pure and lofty gods of Heaven!

If a man is disloyal and unfilial, crimes most heinous, and offers a thousand in gold and threefold sacrifice to win praise from the ruler or pardon from the state, can he succeed?

If not even men forgive such, how could spirits, who are righteous and just, bend to bribes and flattery?

A wise ruler or upright minister rewards the good without taking bribes, and punishes evil without private bias.

How much more the gods, who are farther beyond all partiality!

They cannot be moved by clever words nor bought by rich offerings, this is clear."

3 On the Meaning of the Dao

King Ling of Chu served as his own shaman, sparing no victim in his sacrifices, yet he could not repel the armies of Wu.

4 - Futility

The Prince of Guangling in Han lavished treasure on Li Xu, yet could not escape the penalty of rebellion.

Emperor Wu of Han devoutly honored all gods, yet could not avoid death at Wuchuo.

The ruler Sun of Wu ennobled Huaxiang as a god, yet could not extend his allotted years.

It was not that their offerings lacked abundance, nor their faith sincerity, nor their reverence depth, but their effort was spent on the distant while they ignored the near."

5. Virtue Is True Fragrance

"Duke Wu of Wei punished false Daoists and lived long and noble.

The prefect of Lujiang ended mountain sacrifices and prospered.

Governor Wen Weng destroyed the shrine of the Water Spirit, and both he and his people were blessed.

Cao Cao forbade the cult of licentious gods, and great fortune attended him.

Thus we see:

Virtue itself is fragrant.

The untroubled live long.

The miserly are not cut short.

Those who labor excessively grow old before their time.

This is the natural law.

What need of outer offerings?

When harmony within is lost, disease forms in the cracks.

When vital energy is exhausted, the person does not awaken.

What can threefold sacrifice avail?

The superstitions of the people are countless, deceptions that deepen with time.

They know neither the medical arts nor the true cure of their delusion, they neglect medicine and rely on prayers, consulting shamans without end.

The sorcerers speak lies of demons and calamities.

The people believe and impoverish themselves.

The rich exhaust their stores, The poor borrow and pledge.

Fields and homes are sold for rites.

Chests are emptied for the priests.

If by chance a sickness recovers, they say, ‘the gods have healed me’.

If death comes, they say, ‘the ghosts refused mercy’.

Some survive but lose their wealth, then starve and die.

Others turn to theft and murder, perishing by blade and law, all from this cause.

Even when everything is gone, they still spend on worship, enriching greedy shamans.

When they die, no burial goods remain.

Their corpses rot, pitiful to see.

Such is the blindness of the common people.

The worship of false spirits is forbidden by the rites, yet men never awaken.

Rulers should therefore strengthen the law.

Punish the shamans with death, display their bodies in the market and

within days the cults will cease.

Thus hunger and theft, born of superstition, will be cut off at the root and no small benefit to the realm.”

6. The False Ways

In former times there were men.

Zhang Jue, Liu Gen, Wang Xin, Li Shen, who claimed a thousand years of life, borrowing the name of the Dao to deceive the world.

They sat and vanished, changed their faces and forms, bewitching the simple and gathering the foolish.

They neither sought to extend life, nor to heal the sick or avert misfortune, but instead gathered followers for rebellion and gain.

They stole the hearts of the credulous, hoarded mountains of gold and silk, and lived more richly than princes.

Their halls were filled with dancers, their chambers with concubines.

Flutes and strings surrounded them, and assassins served their will.

Outlaws hid beneath their roofs, and power bent before them.

Because officials did not punish, the poison spread and the harm deepened.

I, a common man, can only sigh, to see such delusion and be powerless to stop it.

Those in office fear the spirits.

Their wives and servants whisper that resistance brings curse.

And so they let the false thrive.

Yet I have known men who worshiped no gods, who prayed to no spirit, and yet lived long and noble lives, their sons and grandsons prosperous.

I myself perform only the rites for my forebears.

I have traveled ten thousand li by land and river, passed a hundred shrines and temples, never bowing to one and no harm has ever come to me.

Through pestilence, I found medicine, through war, I met no wound.

Thus do I know, the spirits have no power over the upright.

As for the false Daoist sect, most slaughter beasts and eat blood.

Only the Li family's "Way of Non-Action" is somewhat cleaner.

Yet even they, when offering for blessings, feast with extravagance,

spending without measure, their kitchens crowded with cooks.

How can this be purity?

Such practices, too, should be forbidden.

7.The Li Family's Way

When asked, "From where came the Way of the Li family?" I answered:

In the time of Emperor Sun of Wu, there lived in Shu a man named Li A, who dwelt in caves and took no food.

People called him the “Elder of Eight Hundred Years”.

Those who came to him, he answered not with words, but by the look upon his face.

When it brightened, fortune came.

When it darkened, calamity drew near.

A smile meant joy.

A sigh meant sorrow.

He never erred, and one day vanished from sight.

Later, a man named Li Kuan came from Shu to Wu.

He healed with water and incantation, and the people said:

“Li A has returned!”.

They called him Li Eight Hundred.

From nobles to commoners, they filled his gate.

As fame grew, so did pride.

He closed his doors, and visitors could only bow outside.

A thousand disciples served him, yet his arts were shallow.

A few charms, a few breaths of the sun and moon.

He knew not the elixirs of immortality, nor the methods of refining spirit and body.

Those who fasted by his teaching lived perhaps a hundred days.

His skill reached no further.

Those who saw him said “His body was frail, his hair white,

his eyes dim, his teeth gone”.

Yet his followers insisted “He only feigned death to ascend!”.

When a great plague came upon Wu, Li Kuan himself fell ill and entered his hut to “meditate.”

There he died.

Still, his disciples called it a “corpse-transcendence”.

But the Way of the Immortals is not to age, not to die.

Kuan aged and died, his failure is clear.

If “corpse-transcendence” were true, why not first live long and vigorous upon the earth?

The immortal Way exists indeed, but Kuan was not its man.

I speak this fully because his followers, now spread across the rivers of the South, mistake his illusion for truth.

May they awaken from their dreaming.

8. False Miracles

The world teems with things that seem true but are not.

Listen to these few tales:

In Runan, a man set snares for deer.

A traveler stole his catch, but left a dried abalone in its place.

The hunter found it and thought it divine.

The villagers built a shrine, naming it “Lord Abalone”.

Some sick men chanced to recover, and all believed in its power.

Feasts and drums filled the place.

Years later, the traveler returned and said “It was my abalone!”.

The cult ceased at once.

9 . The Plum and the Mulberry

In Bailian, Zhang Zhuo dug up a plum tree, intending to move it home.

He wrapped the roots in wet soil and stored it in a hollow mulberry.

Then he forgot.

Later, a plum sprouted from the mulberry, and people said it was divine.

One man prayed there for healing, his eyes were cured by chance.

He sacrificed a pig, and the rumor spread “The tree restores sight!”.

Soon the road was filled with pilgrims, music and wine unending.

When Zhang returned, he said “This is my plum, no spirit!”.

He cut it down, and worship ended.

10. The Stone Man

By the road near the Peng family tomb in Runan stood a stone figure.

An old woman once rested there, placing her cakes upon its head and forgot them.

Passersby found the cakes, thought the stone divine, and began to worship it.

Those who healed by chance brought offerings of chicken, pig, ox, and sheep.

Years passed, music filled the air, until the old woman returned, told her story, and the cult ceased at once.

11. The Lime Spring

West of Luoyang stood an ancient tomb.

Rain filled it, seeping through lime, and the lime-water healed sores.

Travelers bathed there and recovered.

Soon the sick came from afar, a shrine arose and locals sold the "sacred water".

As profit grew, they mixed it with ordinary water by night.

When officials exposed the deceit, they filled in the tomb, and the false god perished.

12. The Pretended Immortal

In Xinggu, the governor Ma desired wealth.

He took a friend, and feigned him to be a divine man.

Rumors spread "He heals blindness and lameness in a day!".

The crowds gathered like markets, and gold piled like hills.

He told the sick "If you are not healed, still say you are to doubt the Way is to lose its power.".

Thus none dared speak truth, and all said they were cured.

Within days, Ma was rich.

Fools are clever in trifles yet blind to wisdom.

They mock the true Way of longevity, but believe every ghost and false miracle.

Such is the folly of the world.

13. On Longevity Without the Dao

Someone asked “Some men know no Dao, no art, yet live long in peace. How is this so?”.

Baopuzi replied “Some have hidden virtue, and Heaven blesses them.

Some are born with long allotment.

Some escape death by chance like a bird between arrows, like grass spared by fire.

But to truly guard life, one must cultivate defense and restraint, and wear Heaven’s talismans.

Prayers and sacrifice avail nothing.

Trust not in ghosts to spare you, but in your own firmness to be beyond harm.

To embrace the One, to encircle the body with light, these ward off evil, but do not lengthen life.

Those who rely only on nature may still die full of years, but when violent spirits or plague arise, they have no defense.

To store armor is not folly if no war comes.

To keep cloaks is not vain if no rain falls.

But when arrows fly and floods descend, the naked suffer first.

Thus, to dismiss the workings of Heaven and Earth because their signs seem small is to deceive the late-born with shallow thought.

The arts of life, how can one call them without value?”

Chapter 10 - Clarifying the Root (明本)

1. On the Root and Branches of the Dao

Someone asked about the precedence of Confucianism and Daoism.

Baopuzi said:

“The Dao is the root of Confucianism.

Confucianism is the branch of the Dao.

The arts of Yin and Yang began first, but became entangled in taboos and superstitions that made men timid and bound.

The Confucians are broad but not essential. Busy with much labor, achieving little.

The Mohists are frugal but too austere, and few can follow them.

The Legalists are strict and lack kindness, injuring benevolence and righteousness.

Only the teaching of Dao embraces spirit and unity, moves in accord with the formless, includes the good of Confucians and Mohists, embodies the essentials of Law, changes with time and harmonizes with circumstance, concise yet clear, few acts yet great results.

It keeps the primal simplicity and guards the true source.

Ban Gu in his history placed Huang-Lao before the Six Classics and called Sima Qian mistaken.

But Sima Qian's learning was vast.

He sifted truth from falsehood, good from evil, and his praise and blame always followed the Way of nature.

He did not flatter virtue, nor conceal fault, nor conform to custom.

Liu Xiang, a man of his own time, called his work a true record.

Ban Gu's judgment cannot overturn that.

Ban Gu was a pure Confucian who never penetrated Dao.

Accustomed to his school, he could not judge beyond it.

But the Dao, how could it be merely an art of nourishing life?

The Book of Changes says:

'Heaven's Dao is yin and yang.

Earth's Dao is softness and firmness.

Human Dao is benevolence and righteousness.'

It also says: 'In the Yi are the four Dao of the sage. If the man be not the right one, the Dao cannot act through him.'

In times of order the age is called 'with Dao', in times of chaos, 'without Dao.'

When ministers discuss principle, it is called 'sitting in Dao.'

When the state possesses Dao, the poor are ashamed. When it loses Dao, the rich are despised.

Thus all things, from the Two Forces above to the myriad below, proceed by Dao.

Huang-Lao hold to the root. The Confucians and Mohists work at the branch.

The true master of Dao understands past and present, observes heaven above and earth below, grasping the cycles of rise and fall, the forms of order and disorder, with mind unconfused and answers for all questions.

Why must he seek longevity arts or imitate Song and Qiao?

Yet narrow scholars, peering through tubes, judge blindly and rashly.

If they hear of a hermit dwelling in mountains practicing Lao's teaching, they ridicule him, saying, 'That is a petty path, not worth counting.'.

Alas! they are like those who hold a firefly in a dark hut, never seeing the splendor of the sky.

Like minnows in puddles who know not the vastness of the seas.

They admire the depth of rivers, not knowing they flow from Kunlun.

They prize ripe millet, unaware that it springs from rich soil.

If one exalts Confucian art but ignores the Dao that makes it possible, it is as blind as honoring the branch while forgetting the root.

Dao is that which molds all the hundred schools, casts the two Forces, bears all species, and brews the moral bonds of humanity.

In this world the shallow are many, the profound few.

The few cannot overcome the many, so it has ever been.

Hence Sima Qian, though long, found little praise.

Ban Gu, though short, met no reproach.

But rarity gives worth. Abundance breeds contempt.

Weeds fill the fields, but orchids bloom but seldom.

Brambles cover the plains, yet the tall tree stands apart.

Sand is countless, but pearls are rare.

Wild geese swarm, yet phoenixes seldom appear.

Thus Ban Gu had many partisans. How could it be otherwise?

The Dao governs the self within and the state without.

It makes the seven luminaries follow their courses, the two energies of yin and yang keep balance, the seasons maintain their rhythm, and wind and rain bring no disaster.

When Dao rules, omens of harmony abound.

Bright lights in heaven, double ears of grain, no pestilence, no rebellion.

Fortresses unbuilt, weapons unused.

Justice without debate, faith without contract, peace without coercion.

The ruler sits above without being heavy.

He stands before without being feared.

His orders unspoken, yet the customs change.

His will unseen, yet hearts transform.

Such is the government of Dao.

When Dao flourishes, the Three August Ones and Five Emperors ruled effortlessly.

When Dao decays, later ages toil and strive in vain.

Where there is abundance, transformation needs no action.

Where there is lack, punishment grows harsh and crime multiplies.

The people grumble below, Heaven grows angry above.

Floods overflow, droughts scorch, mountains collapse, winter thunders and summer snows, blood flows like rivers, corpses build walls, thousands are buried alive, parents eat their children.

As castles grow higher, cunning in siege grows deeper.

As laws grow clearer, thieves multiply.

As oaths increase, rebellions worsen.

Just as when nets tighten, fish thrash.

When traps abound, beasts grow wary.

When fire blazes, the small fish perish.

When rulers and sons fight with blades, when loyalty and piety survive only in ruin.

Then physicians are honored because disease prevails and Confucians and Mohists are esteemed because virtue is lost.

From this you may know the order of precedence between Dao and Confucianism."

2. Why Sages Now Withdraw

Someone asked:

"In ancient times immortals like Chi Songzi, Wang Qiao, Qin Gao, Lao Zi, Peng Zu, Wu Cheng, Yu Hua, all true men, served in office and did not hide away.

Why now do those who practice the Dao all flee the world?"

Baopuzi said:

“In former ages, men were simple and honest, deceit had not yet arisen.

Those who believed in Dao studied diligently. Those who did not simply kept silent.

There was no slander or suspicion.

Thus true men could live among the people without hurry to withdraw.

But in later times, custom grew cunning and false.

Purity declined, vulgarity increased.

They disbelieve Dao, ridicule and defame it, calling truth ‘sorcery’, immortality ‘delusion’.

They say it deceives the masses, disturbs society.

Therefore the superior man is ashamed to dwell among them.

Seeing the signs of coming danger, the wise depart before dawn.

When the ox was slain at Zhao, Confucius turned his carriage.

When the wine was not set out, Master Mu left before night.

How much more those of different aspiration!

When pools dry, dragons do not swim.

When nests fall, phoenixes do not roost.

When a house fills with gossip, gulls do not descend.

When common weeds choke the field, rare herbs cannot grow.

When the world despises the upright, how can the man of Dao not spread his wings to the clouds and vanish into the dark?

The mountains themselves do not confer Dao, but the man of Dao must enter mountains to flee the stench and dwell in purity.

For when refining elixirs or summoning spirits, even a coarse word from a foolish man can drive away the descending deities and spoil the divine medicine.

Such taboos are not small.

If one stays among men, some shallow official will condemn him.

Friends and kin will distract him with worldly visits.

Better to hide completely and avoid the corruption of rats.

Some say:

‘The highest adept gains Dao amid armies.

The middling gains it in the city.

The lowest gains it in the mountains.’

This means that those whose elixirs are complete cannot be harmed by blade or plague wherever they dwell.

But for beginners, isolation in the hills is necessary.

One cannot expect a novice to live in markets and armies and still obtain Dao.

Thus even Huang and Lao withdrew from court in their day.”

3. The Minor Differences Between Dao and Confucianism

Someone asked:

“Since Dao is the source and Confucianism its branch, what then are the small distinctions between them?”

Baopuzi said:

“The Confucian devotes himself to ceremonies of rising and bowing, the three-thousand forms of ritual, the arts of offense and defense, advance and retreat, the tempering of joy and sorrow, the ordering of society.

The Daoist casts aside external things and cleverness, forgets wealth and rank, cuts off persuasion and dissuasion, feels no shame in poverty nor pride in success, is unmoved by praise or blame.

The Confucian prays through sacrifice.

The Daoist averts evil by upright conduct.

The Confucian loves power and profit.

The Daoist treasures freedom from desire.

The Confucian is anxious for name and gain.

The Daoist keeps to the One and perfects himself alone.

The Confucian studies ledgers and commentaries.

The Daoist practices the teachings that purge emotion.

The Daoist -

In action, perfects himself and so accomplishes all.

In living, takes what others do not covet.

In governance, stops calamity before it begins.

In giving, benefits all without claiming merit.

In movement, observes people with care.

In stillness, dwells in caution and content.

Thus he is lord of the hundred schools and ancestor of benevolence and righteousness.

The small distinctions lie only in such matters.

Their origin and end remain unchanged."

4. The False Critique of Daoism

Someone said:

"The Confucians, Zhou and Kong, left the Six Classics, the unchanging standard of ruling states and conducting life.

Their work is lofty and elegant, the foundation of families and nations.

But Daoist recluses ignore propriety, wander with beasts, isolated and shunned. Surely they are lost souls forgetting their duty."

Baopuzi replied:

"To debate adornment and rhetoric is not my wish, nor to argue cleverness.

Yet to see a child fall into a well moves the benevolent heart.

To see a blind man strike a pillar stirs universal love.

Let me roughly state one corner.

Those who embody Dao to craft the world and treasure virtue to prolong life, these are the teachings of Huang and Lao.

The Yellow Emperor governed to perfection and then ascended to heaven.

How can he be said to follow after Yao and Shun?

Lao Zi embraced ritual and yet lived long.

How is he inferior to Zhou and Kong?

Even Confucius lamented that he could not match Lao Zi, never once did he slander him.

But later mediocre men, failing to find the gate, cling to Confucius and Mozi while cursing the Daoists.

Like sons reviling their ancestors, ignorant of their own source.

The hands of a dwarf cannot overturn Mount Song;

The legs of a cripple cannot wade the sea.

So too the shallow Confucians, bustling in what they know, unable to reach broad truth.

They adorn wicked words to attack Dao, praising the dregs of texts while missing their spirit.

Like seeing a fine horse only as it flashes past or diving into a deep pool only to drown.

They are like a sparrow flapping short wings against an ocean wave, a fly struggling up a cliff.

Their strength is not equal to their aim.

They are trapped in narrow frames, their ears never hearing the vast, their eyes never seeing the clear, yet they wish to stand on tiptoe and embrace the sun and moon!

Is that not blindness?

If one could rise to heaven's wheel, he would know how low the well truly is.

Seeing the great light of the sky, he would know how petty the firefly's glow.

I was not born knowing, nor early believing.

I too once wandered in darkness as you.

But when I beheld the vast and secret teachings, I only regretted not escaping delusion sooner.

The Five Classics are explicit and annotated, even beginners can grasp them.

But the divine scriptures of gold and jade, the words of immortals, record their essentials rarely in writing.

Only by oath on the altar are oral formulas transmitted.

Unless you are the right person, even if you offer kingdoms of gold, you shall not receive them.

Even if you have the books without a master, you will not understand their depth.

Like seeing the head but not the feet.

Those who attain immortality ascend to the Clear Heavens, soar in the Purple Clouds, dwell on the Isles of Mystery, or rest beneath the paulownia, listening to celestial music, feasting on the ninefold herbs.

They travel beyond the inverted light, and dwell in radiant palaces of eternal sun.

How could they consort with foxes and monkeys in the marsh?

To think so is ignorance indeed.

The Dao wanders like rainbow and cloud, soars through the scarlet sky.

Its adepts go where they wish.

If the world rejects them, they are not grieved.

Those gathered in stables, though clothed in silk, know nothing of the joy of the wild unicorn free in the hills, nor of the blessed light that departs from common dust.”

Chapter 11 - Immortal Medicines (仙藥)

1. The True Nature of Immortal Medicine

Baopuzi said:

The Divine Farmer's(Shen Nong) Four Classics declare:

"Superior medicines bring peace to the body and prolong life.

They allow ascent among the gods of Heaven, free wandering above and below, command of myriad spirits, and the growth of feathers upon the body.

When one desires to eat, food appears instantly."

It also says:

"The Five Mushrooms (or Five Immortal Fungi), as well as cinnabar, jade powder, azurite, realgar, orpiment, mica, and the divine 'Surplus of Yu' (the sacred mineral of Great Yu), each may be taken alone.

All confer flight and longevity."

It further says:

"Middle medicines nourish the nature.

Lower medicines remove diseases.

They prevent poison and insects from harming, fierce beasts from attacking, evil vapors from approaching, and malicious spirits from nearing."

The Classic of Filial Piety and the Contract of the Spirits say:

"Pepper and ginger dispel dampness.

Sweet flag (calamus) sharpens hearing.

Jusheng(菊生) prolongs life.

Weixi(微析) repels weapons."

All these are supreme words of the saints and true records of the arts.

Their meaning is bright and clear, yet the people of this world persist in disbelief.

A matter worth deep sighs.

Among immortal medicines, the highest is cinnabar,

next gold,

then silver,

then the various divine mushrooms (zhi),

then the five jades,

then mica,

then pearls,

then realgar,

then the divine surplus of Yu (yu yuliang),

then the yellow seed within stone,

then stone cinnamon,

then rock crystal,

then rock brain (bitumen),

then sulfur,

then stone terraces,

then azurite,

then pine resin, poria, rehmannia, ophiopogon, ju sheng (great victory herb), chong lou, coptis, stone fern, paper mulberry fruit, and xiangchai (to lu), also called the Immortal's Staff, or the Staff of the Queen Mother of the West, or "Heaven's Essence," or "the Reverser of Age," or "Earth Bone," or "Gouqi" (wolfberry).

As for tianmendong (Asparagus root), it is also called dimendong, yanmendong, dianji, yin yang shi, or guan song.

Those that grow in high, dry ground have short roots, sweet taste, and fragrant qi, these are best.

Those that grow near water have fine leaves, yellowish hue, long bitter roots, and foul odor, these are inferior, though still usable.

It tends to promote downward qi; its benefit is therefore slow to manifest.

After one hundred days of taking it, all body functions strengthen twofold, superior even to shu (Dioscorea) and huangjing (Polygonatum).

When entering mountains, it can be steamed and eaten, enough to dispense with grains.

If one has strength, it may be ground into powder or pressed for its juice and made into wine. The powdered form is best.

In Chu, people call tianmendong "hundred-part root" (baibu), but there is another plant truly called baibu used only to cure cough and kill lice.

It must not be mistaken for food use.

Likewise, huangjing (“yellow essence”) is also called baiji (“white conjunction”), but it is not the same as the starch-producing baiji.

In the herbal canon, many plants share names though not natures.

Only the learned can discern them.

Huangjing(黄精) is also called rabbit bamboo, salvation of the poor, or hanging pearls.

Its flowers surpass its fruit in virtue, its fruit surpasses its root, but the flowers are hard to obtain.

Ten bushels of fresh flowers dry to only five or six pecks, and one takes three he daily.

Only those with great strength can gather enough.

After ten years of taking huangjing, one obtains great benefit.

Both huangjing and shu(熟地黄, rehamnnia) cut off the need for grains, though shu makes one strong and vigorous, able to carry weight and travel through danger.

Huangjing is sweeter and easier to eat, so that in years of famine, both elders and children can live on it, calling it “grain jerky”,

2. The Five Divine Mushrooms (五芝)

The five mushrooms are:

Stone zhi, wood zhi, grass zhi, flesh zhi, and fungus zhi.

Each with a hundred kinds.

Editors note – Lingzhi(灵芝) is reishii mushroom. Ganoderma lucidum.

3. Stone Zhi

The stone elephant zhi grows at the edges of the seas, on sacred mountains and rocky islands.

Its form resembles a living creature, like an elephant with head, tail, and four feet, attached to great stones on high cliffs and steep peaks.

Red ones are like coral, white ones like lard, black ones like lacquer, green ones like kingfisher feathers, yellow ones like gold.

All bright and translucent like clear ice.

On dark nights they can be seen shining from three hundred paces away.

Large ones weigh over ten catties, small ones three or four.

Unless one has fasted for long and purified the spirit, or carries the Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure of Laozi, one cannot behold such things.

When one finds a zhi, place the “Open-Mountain, Expel-Harm” talisman upon it so that it cannot hide or transform.

Choose an auspicious royal day, make offerings of wine and dried meat, pray and then approach it, stepping in the yu-bu (Nine-Step Pace), holding the breath.

If one obtains a stone elephant zhi, grind it thirty-six thousand times, take one fangcun(Square inch or 3.3cm, a couple grams of material) spoon three times daily.

One catty grants a thousand years.

Ten catties, ten thousand years.

It can be shared among others.

The jade-fat zhi grows on mountains rich in jade, always in perilous cliffs.

The flowing jade essence, after ten thousand years, congeals into zhi of shapes resembling birds or beasts, colors varying, mostly blue-green like jade.

It gleams like crystal.

Grind it and mix with sap of the “heartless herb”, instantly it becomes water.

Drinking one pint grants a thousand years.

The Seven Brights and Nine Lights zhi are stone mushrooms growing on high cliffs near water.

They resemble dishes a foot wide, with stalks a few inches long.

Those with seven holes are Seven Brights.

Those with nine holes are Nine Lights.

Their light glows like stars, visible for hundreds of paces at night.

Their radiances are distinct and cannot merge.

Seek them at autumn equinox.

Grinding and taking one fangcun warms the body, tastes sweet, and one catty grants a thousand years.

The body shines; in darkness it glows like the moon, allowing night vision.

The Honey-Stone zhi grows in a cavern of Mount Shaoshi.

The cave is deep, echoing endlessly when stones are thrown in.

Outside stands a stone pillar topped by a slab like a canopy.

From above, honey zhi drips into the slab one drop at a time, like post-rain leakage from a roof.

The dripping never ceases, yet the slab never overflows.

On the cave mouth is carved in tadpole script.

“He who obtains and takes one dou(Around 10 litres or 2.2 gallons of volume) of Honey-Stone zhi shall live ten thousand years.”

No one has yet reached it but since the inscription exists, surely some ancient did.

When the Stone-Cinnamon Zhi grows within mountain caves, it resembles a small cinnamon tree though made of stone.

It glows, tastes pungent, and its branches can be broken and burned without being consumed by fire.

Pound and take one jin of it, and one lives a thousand years.

The Yellow Seed in Stone appears in many mountains, but most abundantly in Mount Qinshui.

Within large boulders, the stone is moist and never dry.

After breaking through many layers, one finds inside a yellow-red liquid, like an egg within its shell.

It must be drunk immediately. Once it congeals into stone, it can no longer be consumed.

If drunk while still fluid, one may live a thousand years.

The Stone-Brain Zhi grows within slippery stones, much like the Yellow Seed in Stone, but is rarer. One must break a thousand stones to find one piece.

Freshly broken, it glows in five colors and moves of itself.

Drinking one sheng(1lt or ¼ gallon) grants a thousand years.

The Sulfur Zhi grows in all Five Sacred Peaks, most abundant on Mount Ji.

Local traditions say the recluse Xu You took this and thus lived long, refusing Emperor Yao's throne.

All red "stone-sulfur elixirs" are of this kind, oozing from cliffs in moist spots.

When soft, they may be rolled into pills; when hardened, powdered and taken.

There are said to be one hundred and twenty kinds of stone zhi, recorded in the Taiyi Jade Registers and Changyu Records, too many to list fully.

4.Wood Zhi (木芝)

When the resins of pine and cypress sink into the earth for a thousand years, they transform into poria (茯苓).

After ten thousand years, small woody sprouts arise upon them, shaped like lotus flowers, these are called Wood-Weixi Zhi (威喜木芝).

They shine at night, are slick to the touch, and do not burn.

Wearing one repels weapons.

If tied to a rooster and surrounded by twelve others in a cage, all other roosters struck by arrows will be injured, but the one wearing Weixi Zhi will remain unharmed.

Harvest it from the "Gate of Life" of the host tree on a liujia day;

Dry it in shade for a hundred days, grind to powder, take one fangcui three times daily, and after consuming one piece, one lives three thousand years.

The thousand-year pine sometimes has a root shaped like a seated man, seven inches long.

When carved, it bleeds red sap.

Smearing this on the soles allows walking over water.

Smearing it on the nose permits breathing underwater.

Smearing it on the body grants invisibility, to become visible, wipe it off.

It also heals illness.

If pain lies within, scrape a knife-tip of the resin and ingest.

If swelling is external, apply to the spot, and it heals instantly.

When mixed with jusheng herb and burned as a candle, it reveals buried gold and jade.

Their light turns blue and descends toward the ground.

Grinding and consuming ten jin grants a thousand years.

The three-thousand-year pine produces Flying-Joint Zhi (飛節芝), a resin clump shaped like a dragon's joint, weighing up to ten jin.

Taking all of it yields five hundred years of life.

There is also the Fan-Tao Zhi, whose trunk rises like a dragon, with red silk-like blossoms and turquoise fruit.

It grows in shady valleys near east-flowing springs.

Taken at the start of summer, one plant grants five thousand years.

The Participating Zhi is bright red, resonant when struck like metal, and when broken, rejoins as before.

The Wood-Qu Zhi grows parasitic on great trees, lotus-shaped, nine stalks per cluster, sweet and pungent.

The Jianmu Zhi grows in Du and Guang.

Its bark coils like a snake, its fruit like a phoenix.

These three, if taken, grant ascension to Heaven in daylight.

Yellow-Luzi, Xunmu Flower, and Xuan-Ye Flower grow in Mount Tai and Fenggao.

Each grants a thousand years.

The Yellow-Sandal-Huan Zhi grows beneath ancient sandalwood trees.

Beneath the main trunk, one or two zhang away, its roots form a three-bushel cavity linked by fine fibers.

Grinding and consuming one cluster makes one an earth immortal, never dying.

There are a hundred and twenty more types, each with diagrams.

5. Grass Zhi (草芝)

The Self-Swaying Zhi moves without wind.

Its stalk is thick as a finger, red like cinnabar, with pale amaranth-like leaves.

Its root forms a large bulb like a dou measure, surrounded by twelve small ones like eggs, arranged as the twelve branches around it, connected by hairlike roots.

It grows on high mountains and deep valleys where no other plants exist.

Grinding and taking the main bulb grants a thousand years.

Each small one grants a hundred years.

Carrying the main root makes one invisible, to appear, turn it counterclockwise.

The Ox-Horn Zhi grows on Mount Hushou and Wuban, resembling an onion, curving like ox horns, three or four feet long, blue-green in color.

Take one fangcun thrice daily for a hundred days to gain a thousand years.

The Dragon-Immortal Zhi is shaped like entwined dragons, its leaves scale-like, its root coiled.

One piece grants a thousand years.

The Hemp-Mother Zhi resembles hemp, with red stalk and purple flowers.

The Purple-Bead Zhi bears yellow flowers, red leaves, and purple fruit like plums, twenty-four branches joined like a string of pearls.

The White-Talisman Zhi stands four to five feet high like a plum tree, blooms in heavy snow, fruits in late winter.

The Vermilion-Herb Zhi has nine bends, each with three leaves and three fruits.

The Five-Virtues Zhi looks like a palace, square-stemmed, with five colors unmixed, canopy-shaped, collecting sweet dew in its cup, emitting purple vapors several feet high.

The Dragon-Holding Zhi appears in mid-spring, three joints, twelve branches, its root shaped like a seated man.

Each of these has another hundred and twenty varieties.

Taken dried, they unite one's life with Heaven and Earth, granting one or two thousand years.

6. Flesh Zhi (肉芝)

The "Flesh Zhi" refers to living creatures whose bodies themselves become elixirs.

The Ten-Thousand-Year Toad has horns upon its head and red inscriptions of sixteen characters under its chin.

It must be taken at midday on the fifth day of the fifth month, and dried in shade for one hundred days.

If one draws a line on the ground with its left foot, flowing water will appear.

If one wears its left hand upon the body, it repels the five kinds of weapons. Arrows and bolts shot toward the bearer turn back upon their shooters.

The Thousand-Year Bat is white as snow and hangs upside down because its brain is heavy.

Powdered and taken, it grants forty thousand years of life.

The Thousand-Year Spirit-Turtle has five colors upon its shell.

The male's brow bears twin bones like horns.

Wash it with sheep's blood, remove and roast the shell, grind it, and take one fangcun three times daily.

One full shell grants a thousand years of life.

In the mountains, sometimes small people appear riding miniature horses or chariots, seven or eight inches tall.

These too are "Flesh Zhi."

If caught and eaten, one instantly becomes an immortal.

The Wind-Born Beast resembles a sable, blue in color, as large as a civet cat.

It lives in the great forests of the southern seas.

To catch it, set nets and heap many carts of firewood around.

When burned, the flames cannot consume it.

Its fur remains unscorched, knives and spears cannot pierce it.

If struck with an iron hammer upon the head dozens of times, it dies.

If its mouth is opened facing the wind, it revives and runs away but if the nostrils are stopped with stone calamus, it dies again.

Taking its brain mixed with chrysanthemum powder, after ten jin, one gains five hundred years.

The Thousand-Year Swallow nests facing north and has mostly white plumage with upturned tail.

Dry and powder one swallow; each head grants five hundred years.

There are one hundred and twenty kinds of these “flesh zhi.”

7. Fungus Zhi (菌芝)

The Fungus Zhi grows in deep mountains, beneath large trees, or beside springs.

Its forms vary:

Some resemble palaces and halls, some like chariots and horses, some like dragons and tigers, some like human figures, some like birds in flight.

They appear in all five colors, numbering one hundred and twenty types, each illustrated in diagrams.

They must be harvested using the Yu-bu (Nine-Step Pace), cut with bone knives, dried in shade, and powdered.

Taking one fangcun leads to ascension.

Middling kinds grant thousands of years.

The lesser, one thousand.

To seek these zhi, enter sacred mountains in the third or ninth lunar months, for those are the times when mountains “open” and reveal divine medicines.

Do not go on “Mountain Fierce” days, choose auspicious “Heaven-Assist” times, and the conjunction of the Three Marvels is best.

Depart through the Auspicious Gate, choose a day of Six Yin and an hour of the Bright Hall, carry the Talisman of the Numinous Treasure, lead a white dog, hold a white chicken, and bring one dou of white salt.

Lay the “Mountain-Opening Order” upon a great stone.

Carry a bundle of Wu-tang grass when entering the mountain.

The mountain spirits rejoice, and zhi will surely be found.

Harvest and take them on auspicious royal days, when stems and branches of the calendar mutually generate, those days are best.

Such divine fungi exist in many mountains, but ordinary Daoists, impure in heart and deed, and ignorant of mountain rites, even with maps in hand, never find them.

Each mountain, great or small, has its own guardian spirits.

If they do not bestow zhi, one may tread directly upon them and still not see.

8. Mica (云母)

Mica comes in five types, though few can tell them apart.

One must hold the piece toward the sun and observe its colors, only then can one distinguish them.

Seen in shadow, its hues are not apparent.

When all five colors appear, and the blue predominates, it is called Cloud Radiance (云英), best taken in spring.

If red predominates, it is Cloud Pearl (云珠), best for summer.

If white predominates, it is Cloud Fluid (云液), best for autumn.

If black predominates, it is Cloud Mother (云母), best for winter.

If only blue and yellow appear, it is Cloud Sand (云沙), best for late summer.

Pure white and shining is Phosphor Stone (磷石), may be taken in all seasons.

Methods of taking mica -

Dissolve it in water made from cinnamon, onion, and jade powder, or expose it to dew in an iron vessel and boil with “dark water”, or mix with nitre in a tube and bury it to make elixir-water, or blend with honey into curd, or soak in autumn dew for one hundred days and grind into powder, or mix with “No-Top Herb” and tree blood as pills.

After one year’s use, all illnesses are gone.

After three years, the old turn to youth.

After five, one commands spirits, walks through fire and water unharmed, and may meet immortals.

Ordinary matter burns and rots, but the Five Micas, even in fierce fire, never burn, nor decay underground, therefore they preserve life endlessly.

After ten years’ taking, a cloud continually hovers above the head.

Taking its “mother” brings forth its “child”, the principle of natural generation.

If, when held to sunlight, it shows dull black vapor, it is unfit for use.

It causes sores and urinary trouble.

Before using, it must be soaked for a hundred days in eave-water or eastern stream dew, washed clean of soil and grit.

Wei Shuqing of Zhongshan took it long enough to ride the clouds.

His formula was sealed in a jade box, and after he ascended, his descendant Shi and the envoy Liang Bo found it and practiced it, they too became immortals.

9. Realgar (雄黃)

Only the realgar from Mount Wudu is pure and fit for immortal use.

Its color is as red as a rooster's comb, radiant and luminous, this alone is suitable.

Those that are merely yellow without red brilliance are not true realgar.

They can be used for ordinary healing, but not for elixirs of immortality.

Methods of preparation -

One may steam or boil it, or steep it in wine, or first dissolve it in nitre-water and let it solidify again, or wrap it in ox intestines and steam it beneath red clay, or mix it with pine resin, or refine it together with three other ingredients until it draws out like cloth, white as ice.

Taken in any of these ways, it brings long life, cures all diseases, expels the Three Corpses (malignant spirits within the body), erases scars, turns white hair black, and causes fallen teeth to regrow.

After a thousand days, the Jade Maidens descend to serve the adept, obeying his commands and preparing spirit food.

The Jade Maidens each bear a mark of true yellow jade upon their noses, the size of a millet grain, this mark reveals their reality.

Those lacking it are mere ghosts who test the practitioner.

10. Jade (玉)

Jade too is an immortal medicine, though hard to obtain.

The Classic of Jade says:

“Those who take gold live as long as gold, those who take jade live as long as jade.”

It also says:

“Those who take the True Black Substance (玄真, another name for jade) have lives without limit.”

It causes the body to lighten and ascend, not merely granting earthly immortality but celestial flight.

However, the path is slow.

One must consume one to two hundred jin before results are clear.

Jade can be dissolved in black rice wine or in di yu herb wine to make elixir-water.

It may also be dissolved with onion juice to make jade paste, or ground and mixed with honey into pills, or burned to ash and taken as powder.

After one year or more of taking it, one may enter water without being wet, enter fire without being burned, suffer no harm from blades or poisons.

But ready-made jade vessels or carved artifacts must never be used, they injure rather than help.

One must use uncarved jade (puyu, raw jade stone).

The finest comes from the kingdom of Khotan (Yutian), the white variety being best.

Next best are the jades of Nanyang, Xu Shanting, and the Lurong River in Rinan.

Master Chisongzi soaked jade in the blood of the “mysterious insect” and drank it as water.

This allowed him to ride upon smoke and rise and descend at will.

Powdered jade or jade-water both prevent death.

Its only inferiority to gold is that it often causes inner heat, like the “Cold-Food Powder”.

Therefore, when taking jade powder, every ten days one should also take a small knife-tip of realgar and cinnabar, wash the hair in cold water, and walk against the wind, then the heat will not arise.

Dong Junyi once gave jade wine to a blind man, and within ten days his sight was restored.

Wu Yanzhi once desired to take jade but lacked complete instructions.

He gathered pieces of carved jade, disks, tubes, rings, and sword fittings and sought to refine and consume them.

I told him such worked jade was useless and dangerous.

He sighed: “Truly, precision is everything; without it, not only is there no benefit, but disaster may result.”

11. Silver (銀)

Silver is only slightly inferior to gold and jade, yet still grants earthly immortality.

To take it: dissolve in barley-water, or steep in red-grass wine, or refine it with dragon-fat (a mythical resin).

Three doses, each as large as a bullet, are needed.

Something beyond the means of the poor ascetic.

12. Pearls (真珠)

Pearls an inch wide or greater can be used as elixirs.

Soak them in curdled milk until they melt like quicksilver, or dissolve them in pumice-water or honeycomb solution, or combine them with the gall of the red serpent and orpiment.

They stretch into threads several feet long.

Form into pills.

Taken regularly and with abstention from grains, they confer immortality.

Unsticking lacquer (pure sap that does not adhere) also grants communion with spirits and longevity.

To prepare it, throw in ten “Great Crabs” (or “gutless princes,” likely large crustaceans), add mica-water or jade-water, and mix into medicine.

It expels the Nine Worms and bad blood from the nose.

Within one year, the spirit kitchen (divine provision) will arrive every six days.

13. Cinnamon, Sesame, and Other Herbs

Cinnamon can be steamed with onion sap to make elixir-water, or mixed with bamboo sap to make pills, or combined with the brain of a “wise beast” (or turtle).

After seven years one can walk on water and live forever.

The herb Jusheng (also called foreign sesame) prevents aging and dispels dampness, strengthening the frail.

Peach gum, soaked in mulberry-ash juice, heals all diseases.

Long taken, it makes the body light and luminous.

In darkness one glows like the moon.

When taken in large amount, it replaces the need for food.

14. Citron Fruit, Locust Seed, and Other Longevity Herbs

The red fruit of the ning tree (citron) taken for one year makes the old young again and allows the eyes to see spirits.

A Daoist named Liang Xu began at age seventy.

He grew youthful again, and by 140 could run beside galloping horses and write by night.

He later entered Mount Qinglong and departed.

The seeds of the locust tree, sealed in a new jar with clay for twenty days until the skin rots, are washed clean and eaten daily.

They nourish the brain and prevent white hair, long taken, they confer longevity.

Within the Xuan Zhong Fang formulas, herbs like chu feil ian, zexie, dihuang, huanglian, and others, over three hundred kinds, all extend life and may be taken singly.

Famous compound formulas include Lingfei Powder, Weigua Pill, Zhiming Pill, and Sheep-Blood Pill, each preserving youth and delaying age.

15. The Sweet Valley Water of Nanyang

In Nanyang's Lixian Mountains there is a valley with a sweet spring.

It is sweet because chrysanthemums grow on both banks, their blossoms fall into the stream through the ages, and their essence changes the taste of the water.

The villagers along this valley drink only this water and never dig wells.

All live long lives.

The oldest reach 140 or 150,the youngest still live 80 or 90, none die young.

This comes from the virtue of the chrysanthemum.

Hence, when high officials such as Wang Chang, Liu Kuan, and Yuan Kai governed Nanyang, they ordered forty barrels of this Sweet Valley Water each month for their own use.

It healed their wind and vertigo, though they did not gain the full longevity of the valley people, for those born and raised upon that water gain the deepest effect.

True chrysanthemum resembles yi grass, but is distinguished by its taste.

The chrysanthemum is sweet, yi is bitter, hence the proverb, “Bitter as yi.”

Genuine chrysanthemums are now rare.

They mostly grow by watersides, especially in Mount Goushi and Lixian.

The Immortal Formulas say, “The Sun’s Essence reborn each day, the fullness of the Zhou, both refer to one chrysanthemum.”

Though their words are fine, few now find the true plant.

Those who take the common sort find little effect.

The Sweet Valley Water alone bears its qi.

How much greater, then, would the direct medicine’s power be?

16. The Cinnabar Well (丹砂井)

My late grandfather, the Assistant Minister of the Court of Ceremonies, once served as magistrate of Linyuan.

He said that within his county there lived a family named Liao.

For generations they had been long-lived, some living over a hundred years, others eighty or ninety, with no premature deaths.

Later the family moved away, and their descendants soon began dying young.

Those who moved into their old home then also lived long lives as before.

Wondering at this, my grandfather examined the grounds.

He noticed that the well water there was strangely red.

He ordered the earth dug around it, and found beneath the soil an ancient cache of cinnabar, tens of hu (many bushels) of it, buried just a few feet from the well.

Over the centuries, the cinnabar's essence had seeped into the spring, and so the household that drank it gained longevity.

If such small dilution could lengthen life, how much greater would be the effect of ingesting refined cinnabar directly?

17. The Pine Resin Immortal Zhao Ju (趙瞿服鬆脂)

I also heard that in Shangdang lived a man named Zhao Ju who suffered from leprosy for many years.

All physicians failed to cure him. He was thought near death.

Believing him doomed, his family abandoned him in a mountain cave, leaving food enough for a few days.

There, despairing and weeping day and night for a month, he was discovered by an immortal who pitied him.

The immortal gave him a small pouch of medicine and taught him the method of taking it.

After a hundred days, his sores vanished, his color became bright and full, his skin shone like polished jade.

When the immortal returned, Zhao Ju bowed in gratitude and begged for the formula.

The immortal said, “This is nothing more than pine resin.

This mountain abounds in it.

Refine and consume it, and you will live long and never die.”

Zhao Ju went home, and his family, thinking him a ghost, were terrified for his face glowed and he seemed reborn.

He continued taking pine resin, his body grew light, his strength increased a hundredfold.

He could climb cliffs all day without fatigue.

At age 170, his hair was still black, his teeth intact.

At night, lights the size of mirrors filled his house.

He asked those nearby if they saw them, but none could.

The light grew until it filled the whole room.

Then he saw two tiny maidens on his face, two or three inches tall, perfectly formed, playing around his nose and mouth.

Over a year they grew larger and came to stand beside him.

He heard celestial music like zithers and flutes, and often laughed joyfully to himself.

He lived among people for more than three hundred years, his complexion that of a youth.

Finally he entered Mount Baodu and departed from the world.

Surely an earth immortal.

When others heard of Zhao Ju's practice, they all sought to follow him.

Some brought cartloads of pine resin, others heaps carried by donkeys.

But those lacking patience soon stopped, for within a month they saw no great change.

Truly, few can maintain such resolve.

18. The Hairy Woman of Qin (秦宮女)

In the reign of Emperor Cheng of Han, a hunter in the Zhongnan Mountains saw a naked person covered with black hair.

He pursued it, but the being leapt over ravines and ditches like flight.

At last, with many men encircling the area, they captured her.

It proved to be a woman.

Questioned, she said "I was once a palace woman of Qin.

When the rebels rose in the east, the king surrendered, and the palaces burned.

I fled into the mountains.

Starving, near death, an old man appeared and taught me to eat pine needles and pine nuts.

At first bitter, later I found them sweet.

Since then, I have never been hungry or thirsty, never cold in winter nor hot in summer.".

Calculating by reigns, she must have lived from the time of the Qin king Ziying to the Han Emperor Cheng, over two hundred years.

When they brought her back, they gave her grain to eat, but she vomited at the smell of it and could not stand the odor for days.

After two years she gradually adapted, lost her body hair, and aged rapidly until she died.

Had she not been taken from the mountains, she would surely have become an immortal.

19. The Mountain Spirit Herb (山精)

A man of the Wen family of Nanyang told that his ancestor, during the chaos at the end of the Han, fled to the mountains and nearly starved.

A stranger taught him to eat the “Mountain Spirit Herb,” after which he never felt hunger.

Decades later he returned to his village, his face youthful and his strength greater than before.

He said that while in the mountains, his body was light and could leap over cliffs, walk on ice and snow without cold.

Once he saw a high crag where several people sat gambling and reading.

They looked down at him and said, “Shall this one above be summoned yet?”.

Another replied, “Not yet.”.

The Divine Pharmacopoeia says:

“Those who truly seek long life must often take Mountain Spirit Herb.”

It is also called Mountain Luminescence or Mountain Essence.

20. The Eight Immortals and Their Herbs (八公仙方)

In ancient times there were eight perfected beings, each attaining earthly immortality by taking one single plant.

Each lived for centuries before they compounded the Golden Elixir and ascended to the heavens.

If a man combines all eight substances and refines them together, the mixture will fail for the powers of these medicines overcome and restrain one another.

Han Zhong took sweet flag (changpu) for thirteen years.

His body grew covered in fine hair, he could read ten thousand words a day, and go bare-chested in winter without feeling cold.

The best flag grows upon stones, with at least nine joints per inch and purple flowers.

Zhao Tazi took cinnamon for twenty years.

Hair grew on the soles of his feet, he could walk five hundred li a day, and lift a thousand jin.

Yi Menzi took five-flavor berry (schisandra) for sixteen years.

His complexion was that of a jade maiden.

He could enter water without getting wet and fire without burning.

Chu Wenzi took rehmannia for eight years.

His hands and eyes glowed at night, and he could draw crossbows with his bare hands.

Lin Ziming took poria (fu ling) for eleven years.

His ears lengthened five inches, his body became light enough to leap two fathoms, and he could soar over ravines.

Du Ziwei took asparagus root (tianmen dong) and kept eighty concubines, fathering 130 children.

He could walk three hundred li in a day.

Ren Ziji took poria for eighteen years.

Jade maidens came to serve him, he could appear and vanish at will, ceased to eat grain, and his scars all disappeared, his face shining like jade.

Lingyang Zijong took polygala (yuan zhi) for twenty years.

He had thirty-seven sons, never forgot anything he read, and could die sitting upright, departing at will.

The Scripture of Immortality says “Though herbs and trees may grant centuries of life, those who neglect the divine elixir shall never attain true transcendence.”.

From this we know plants may prolong life, but only the true cinnabar and gold elixirs bestow undying immortality.

Still, before one learns to make the elixirs, these herbs may sustain and preserve the body.

21. The Proper Order of Taking Medicines (服藥前後之宜)

Someone once asked:

“When taking medicines for health and longevity, is there a correct order, before or after meals?”

Bao Puzi replied:

“According to the Treatise of the Central Yellow Master (中黃子服食節度), medicines that cure disease should be taken before eating, while medicines that nourish life should be taken after eating.”

When I consulted Master Zheng about this, he said “It is simple.

If one wishes to attack illness, the medicine must enter when the stomach is empty, so its strength may act freely and directly on the disorder.

If taken after food, the drug’s power is spent upon the digestion of grain, and thus wasted.

But if one wishes to nourish and preserve life, the medicine must come after food, for taken on an empty stomach, the strength of the medicine is driven downward by hunger and passes away before its virtue can permeate the body.

Therefore the ancients distinguished between healing and nourishing in this way.”.

22. On the Harmonies of Medicine

Someone asked:

“Men take medicines to nourish life, yet some are said to suit, and some to conflict.

Is this truly so?”

Baopuzi replied:

“According to the Jade Tablets and the Scripture of Radiant Clarity, the five tones and six correspondences reveal the elemental nature of a man’s fate.

Zi and Wu belong to Metal (Geng).

Mao and You belong to Earth (Ji).

Yin and Shen belong to Earth (Wu).

Chou and Wei belong to Metal (Xin).

Chen and Xu belong to Fire (Bing).

Si and Hai belong to Fire (Ding).

Those born under the One Word belong to the Palace tone and the Earth element.

Those under the Three Words belong to the Zhi tone and the Fire element.

Those under the Five Words belong to the Feather tone and the Water element.

Those under the Seven Words belong to the Commerce tone and the Metal element.

Those under the Nine Words belong to the Horn tone and the Wood element.

Thus -

If one's original fate is of Earth, one should not take green (Wood) medicines.

If of Metal, one should not take red (Fire) medicines.

If of Wood, one should not take white (Metal) medicines.

If of Water, one should not take yellow (Earth) medicines.

If of Fire, one should not take black (Water) medicines.

For in the Five Phases, Wood conquers Earth, Earth conquers Water, Water conquers Fire, Fire conquers Metal, Metal conquers Wood.

Yet if one takes the Golden Elixir, the Great Medicine of the Immortals, then all such distinctions cease for it harmonizes with the whole of Heaven and Earth."

Editors note – I believe it is talking about your day master in your Bazi(Chinese astrology chart). So if you have an earth day master then avoid wood medicines/substances. If wood day master then avoid metal medicines, etc.

23. The Palace Tone (One Word)

Gengzi, Gengwu, Xinwei, Xinchou, Bingchen, Bingxu, Dinghai, Dingsi, Wuyin, Wushen, Jimao, Jiyou.

(These belong to the tone "Palace," governed by Earth.)

24. The Zhi Tone (Three Words)

Jiachen, Jiaxu, Yihai, Yisi, Bingyin, Bingshen, Dingyou, Dingmao, Wuwu, Wuzi, Jiwei, Jichou.

(These belong to the tone “Zhi,” governed by Fire.)

25. The Feather Tone (Five Words)

Jiayin, Jiashen, Yi Mao, Yi You, Bingzi, Bingwu, Dingwei, Dingchou, Renchen, Renxu, Guisi, Guihai.

(These belong to the tone “Feather,” governed by Water.)

26. The Commerce Tone (Seven Words)

Jiazi, Jiawu, Yichou, Yiwei, Gengchen, Gengxu, Xinsi, Xinhai, Renshen, Renyin, Gui Mao, Gui You.

(These belong to the tone “Commerce,” governed by Metal.)

27. The Horn Tone (Nine Words)

Wuchen, Wuxu, Jisi, Jihai, Gengyin, Gengshen, Xinmao, Xinyou, Renwu, Renzi, Guichou, Guiwei.

(These belong to the tone “Horn,” governed by Wood.)

28. The Pace of Yu

Method of the Pace of Yu (禹步法) -

First, lift the left foot, step the right across the left, and bring the left to meet the right.

Next, lift the right foot, step the left across the right, and bring the right to meet the left.

Then again lift the right, cross it over the left, and bring the left to rest beside the right.

29. Completion of the Pace

Thus completing the Three Steps, the measured distance should span two zhang(1 zhang is 10 chi or 3.3 metres) and one chi(1 chi is around 1 foot or 33.3cm).

Behind, there shall remain nine footprints.

30. The Small Divine Pill (小神方)

Ingredients - True cinnabar (真丹) - 3 ji, Pure honey - 1 ji.

Method:

Mix and knead thoroughly, dry it in the sun, and boil until thick enough to roll into pills.

Dosage:

Each morning, take ten pills, each the size of a sesame seed.

Effects:

Within one year, white hair turns black, fallen teeth grow anew, the skin becomes smooth and moist.

Taken continually, the old man becomes youthful again.

If taken without interruption, one lives eternally and never dies.

31. The Small Golden Elixir Recipe (小餌黃金方)

Melt gold in a crucible, then drop it into clear wine, two hundred immersions in and out until the wine boils.

Grasp it quickly and let it ooze through the fingers until soft as clay.

If it fails to boil or pass between the fingers, remelt and repeat until complete.

Form it into a pill the size of a bullet, or divide one pill into smaller ones.

After thirty days of taking it, the adept feels neither heat nor cold, and celestial maidens descend to serve him.

Silver may be refined in the same manner.

Those who take gold or silver thus prepared should dwell within a stone chamber in the mountains.

After one year, they will become light and ascend.

If remaining in the human world, they are called Earth Immortals.

Such secrets must not be lightly transmitted.

32. The Two Principles Recipe (兩儀子餌銷黃金法)

Take pig hide fat- 3 jin, bitter wine - 1 dou, Yellow gold - 5 liang.

Boil together in a vessel, then remove the gold, place it within the fat, immerse and withdraw it one hundred times.

Do likewise with the wine.

To consume -

If one eats 1 jin of gold, life lasts as long as Heaven and Earth.

If half a jin, two thousand years.

If five liang, one thousand two hundred years.

Always make it on a day of royal auspices then the spirit of the medicine will be perfect.

Never transmit it to others casually, if shared without authorization, the elixir loses its potency.

When wishing to expel the corpse-poisons within, take cinnabar beforehand.

33. The Cinnabar Elixir Recipe (餌丹砂法)

Take one jin of cinnabar, grind and sift it fine.

Add three pints of pure bitter wine, two pints of pure lacquer and mix until the substances merge, and simmer gently over a small fire until it can be rolled into pills.

Dosage:

Take three pills, each the size of a sesame seed, twice daily.

Effects:

After forty days, all ailments in the abdomen are cured, and the Three Corpses depart.

After one hundred days, the flesh and bones grow firm and strong.

After one thousand days, the Registrar of Fate erases one’s name from the records of death.

The body endures with Heaven and Earth, the soul shines with the Sun and Moon.

The adept transforms in form and radiance, casting no shadow at noon, for he himself becomes luminous.

Chapter 12 - On Disputations (辨問)

1. Question: If immortality were real, why did the sages not pursue it?

Someone asked:

“If immortality can truly be attained, then surely the ancient sages would have pursued it.

Yet Zhou and Confucius did not, therefore it must not exist.”

Bao Puzi replied:

“The Sage and the Immortal are not the same.

A sage is not necessarily immortal, and an immortal is not necessarily a sage.

The sage receives his Heaven-given mission to restore order to the human world.

He devotes himself to removing the cruel, pacifying the violent, leveling dangers, establishing rites and music, writing laws and teachings, reforming corrupt customs, rescuing rulers on the brink, and saving dying states.

He compiles the Poems and Documents, interprets the River and Luo diagrams, authors the classics, and instructs the youth.

He answers diplomatic summons, travels among kingdoms, so busy that his mat never grows warm and his breath never stills.

How could such a man have leisure to close his senses, turn his hearing inward, control his breath, abstain long from food, and refine his form within a chamber, ascending mountains to gather herbs, counting breaths to summon spirits, and practicing fasting and purification?

Yet for the immortal, only steadfast faith and tireless practice are required, no great genius or scholarly toil.

Thus worldly brilliance is the very burden that prevents attainment of Dao.

The one who unites with the Great Elixir and guards the spirit within, can gain long life and enduring vision. How much more effortless this than the ceaseless labors of the sages!

The sages revered by the world are the sages of order, not the sages of Dao.

Those who attained the Dao such as the Yellow Emperor and Laozi are the sages of transcendence.

The Yellow Emperor first ruled the world, then ascended as an immortal.

Of all the seventy-two ancestral kings whose deeds were inscribed on Mount Tai, only the Yellow Emperor is remembered as one who achieved immortality, this fact speaks clearly for itself."

2. On the Many Kinds of Sages

People call one "sage" who excels beyond others in any field.

Thus, one who masters chess beyond all peers is called a "Sage of Chess".

So it was that Yan Ziqing and Ma Suiming were so named in later times.

He who surpasses all in calligraphy is called a "Sage of Writing," such as Huang Xiang and Hu Zhao.

In painting, Wei Xie and Zhang Mo are "Sages of Painting".

In carving and machinery, Zhang Heng and Ma Jun were called “Sages of Mechanism”.

Mencius said:

“Bo Yi is the Sage of Purity.

Liu Xia Hui, the Sage of Harmony.

Yi Yin, the Sage of Service.”

So indeed “sagehood” is not one thing, there are many kinds:

Ban Shu, Chui, and Di - sages of machines.

Bian Que and Hua Tuo - sages of medicine.

Ziwei and Gan Jun - sages of astrology.

Shi Su and Xin Liao - sages of divination.

Xia Yu and Du Hui - sages of strength.

Jing Ke and Nie Zheng - sages of courage.

Fei Lian and Kuafu - sages of speed.

Ziye and Yan Zhou - sages of musical perception.

Sun Wu and Han Xin - sages of warfare.

Hence “sage” is but the highest title for human skill, not confined to literature or morals.

Even Zhuangzi said:

“The thief too has his sagehood.”

How?

Because -

To know where treasures lie, that is wisdom.

To enter first without hesitation, that is courage.

To depart last without fear, that is righteousness.

To know what may or may not be done, that is understanding.

To divide the spoils evenly, that is benevolence.

Without these, no one becomes a great thief.

3-4. On the Division of the Sage's Path

Someone said:

"The Way of the Sage must be complete and undivided, he must encompass all excellences before he may be called sage."

Bao Puzi replied:

"Confucius had seventy-two accomplished disciples, and each attained but one aspect of the sage's virtue. Does this not show that sagehood is divisible?

He said also: 'Yan Hui possesses the whole but in small measure, thus the sage's virtue has depth and thinness.

The Book of Changes says:

'There are four ways of the sage: those who value speech, those who value action, those who value creation, and those who value divination.'

If the Way of the Sage can be divided thus, why then deny that those who cultivate Dao and achieve transcendence are also “Sages of the Way”?

If there were no “sages of the Dao”, then Zhou and Confucius could not rightly be called “sages of order”.

Some are born under the constellations of saints and kings, others under those of immortals and recluses.

The Jade Key Classic (玉鈐經) says:

“A person’s fortune, whether noble or poor, wise or foolish, long-lived or short is fixed by the stars that govern the day his embryo receives breath.”

Those who receive the qi of the Immortal Stars are drawn naturally toward the Way.

Those who receive the qi of the Mortal Stars feel no faith in it, and even if taught, cannot truly believe.

Thus, the man who becomes immortal is born with that nature.

The one who doubts, though clever and learned, will never find it.”

5. Why the Daoist keeps silent among the worldly

“The adepts of Dao guard their secret treasures.

Even among disciples they reveal the key formulas only after years of testing.

How much less to the uninitiated world, who neither believe nor seek it!

To speak of it would only invite mockery and slander.

Therefore the true masters keep apart.

Their words do not mingle with the world's, their bodies do not mix with the crowd.

Even a thousand li away they fear still the disturbance of worldly noise.

Even in solitude they dread defilement by ridicule.

Wealth cannot lure them, power cannot move them.

How would they parade themselves saying, 'I possess the secret of immortality'?

Thus Zhou and Confucius never came to know the Dao of immortality, it was simply beyond their appointed path."

6. On the limits of Confucius' knowledge

"Zhou and Confucius were great in moral teaching, but limited in divine understanding.

The sage may command kingdoms, but he still hungers when unfed, thirsts when unwatered, feels heat when burned, cold when frozen, and pain when struck.

He ages, sickens, and dies like all men.

In what then does he differ from the ordinary?

He excels only in talent and virtue, not in transcendence.

To demand of him both rulership of the world and mastery of heaven's mysteries, is that not excessive?

I do not slander the sages.

I only exhaust reason and state truth as it is.

Yet because truth often contradicts custom, the ignorant call it "blasphemy".

He then recounts examples from the Analects showing that even Confucius did not know all things.

He could not foresee events, could not recognize certain birds, did not know his father's tomb, mistook omens, was unsure of ritual, geography, and fate.

"If he could err in such near things, why be shocked that he knew not the methods of transcendence?"

Bao Puzi concludes:

"If the vulgar say: 'Since the sages could not do it, no one can',

then how to explain those who lived on water, burned without harm, endured cold and heat, or made their bodies vanish and reappear?

All these have truly been seen, though not by Zhou and Confucius."

7. On the claim that "the sages could do it but did not"

Some say:

"Confucius and Zhou could have done such things, they merely chose not to."

Bao Puzi answers:

“If one dismisses all evidence and relies only on empty claims, then I too may say that Zhou and Confucius flew with wings to the Eight Extremities, summoned clouds and rain, moved mountains and drew up wells, and simply chose not to demonstrate it!

But indeed, there is record that the Wu King once found a golden tablet engraved with the Lingbao Scripture of Longevity, which none could read.

He sent it to Confucius.

Confucius said: ‘This is the Divine Treasure of Lingbao, the method of long life, the practice of Yu the Great, who lived as long as Heaven and Earth.’

If Confucius knew this, how can we say he scorned the Dao?

Perhaps he too practiced it in secret, concealing his immortality lest all men abandon their duties and rush to seek the Way.

For if all knew death could be overcome, families would have no heirs,

states no ministers, loyalty and filial duty would decay.

Thus the sages may have hidden their transcendence under the appearance of mortality.”

He ends:

“Each person’s likes and nature differ.

Some seek wealth and rank, others seclusion and purity.

To say, ‘Because the sages did not practice Dao, therefore there is no Dao’, is like saying that the sun does not shine inside a covered bowl.

The Three Luminaries (Sun, Moon, and Stars) do not fail to shine, it is only the bowl that covers them."

Chapter 13 - Words of the Utmost Truth (極言)

1. The Effort Required for Attainment

Someone asked:

“Were the immortals of old born with special endowments, or did they achieve it through learning and practice?”

Bao Puzi replied:

“What a mistaken notion! None attained it without learning and labor.

All carried their satchels following teachers, enduring toil and hardship, exposed to frost and rain, sweeping temples, serving their masters faithfully.

Only after being tested through adversity and remaining steadfast in integrity, were they admitted into the deeper mysteries.

Many faltered: some grew weary halfway, others became resentful and withdrew.

Some were enticed by fame and profit and returned to worldly affairs.

Others were led astray by false teachings and lost their pure resolve.

Some wished success in a day, hoping for results without perseverance.

Yet among ten thousand men, perhaps one alone can face wealth and beauty without his mind wavering, can hear the words of the vulgar and not have his will shaken.

Therefore, those who begin are like the hairs of an ox, those who succeed are like the horns of a unicorn.

The strong bow shows its power when the arrow is loosed.

The traveler crossing a great river is safe only upon reaching the far bank.

A well that has not reached the spring is as if not dug.

A step short of the goal is as if never begun.

The road of cultivation is long.

Lofty heights are not climbed in an hour, great roots are not grown in a day.

Those who fail do so because, when near success, their strength gives out.

A thousand granaries of grain do not come from one plow.

The wood that pierces heaven is not grown in ten days.

The abyss of the sea begins with shallow waters.

The wealth of Tao Zhu began with single coins.

Yin Xi attained the Great Dao because he advanced when others retreated.

Xianmen gained cloud and dragon because he persisted to the end as at the beginning.

My resolve is firm, how could others compare?”

2. The Difficulty Lies in Perseverance

Bao Puzi said:

“The common people do not know how to preserve life, instead, they destroy it daily.

What is finite cannot supply what is infinite.

Even the river cannot fill a bottomless vessel.

People earn little and spend much, how then could it suffice?

And if one gains nothing but spends endlessly, how can he avoid ruin?

All men, young or old, are afflicted by illness, only the degree differs.

Some are born with more vital energy and thus die late.

Some with little and die early.

Those who know the Dao replenish what is lost and restore balance before seeking further growth.

Yet most people desire rapid results.

If elixirs caused their flesh to sprout wings, or breathing exercises made them fly, then all would believe in the Dao!

But they tire from long effort, waste resources, suffer cold and hunger, and when results are not immediate, they blame the Dao instead of themselves.

Thus they cast away pills and abandon practice.

It is not that long life is hard, it is that hearing the Way is rare.

Not that hearing it is rare, but practicing it is hard.

Not that practicing is hard, but continuing to the end is hardest of all.

A skilled craftsman can show you compass and square, but cannot make you dexterous.

A wise master can give you formulas and books, but cannot make you persevere.

Cultivation is like sowing grain, success is like the harvest.

Even if the field is rich and the water pure, if you miss the season or neglect the plow, you reap nothing.

People fail not only by ignoring benefit, but also by not knowing harm.

Harm acts swiftly, benefit acts slowly.

Men understand the easy but not the hard.

The lamp’s oil burns away unseen, suddenly it is gone.

The sprout grows unnoticed, suddenly it is tall.

Therefore in cultivating life, attend to the smallest details.

Never despise small gain nor ignore small loss.

The great is built from the small, the billion from the one.

If one can cherish the subtle and bring it to completion, he is near the Dao indeed."

3. On Those Who "Accidentally" Live Long

Someone asked:

"Did any of the ancients attain long life without deliberate practice?"

Bao Puzi replied:

"None.

Some followed enlightened teachers, worked diligently, and were rewarded with elixirs.

Others learned secret formulas and refined them alone in silence, so their names remain but their methods are lost.

Even the Yellow Emperor, born gifted and able to command spirits, could not sit still and gain the Dao without study.

He climbed Mount Wangwu to receive the Canon of Elixirs, ascended to the Pool of Dragons and flew among pearls, went to Mount Kongtong to question Guangchengzi, to Mount Juci to serve Da Kui, to Mount Dongdai to honor the Central Yellow Lord, and to the Golden Valley to consult Master Juan.

For nourishing life, he learned from the maidens Xuanshu and Suyü.

for divination and astrology, he consulted Fenghou and Likmu.

for medicine, he received the arts of Lei Gong and Qi Huang.

for geomancy, he studied the writings of Qingwu.

for exorcism, the teachings of Baize.

for metallurgy, the arts of Jin Ye.

for military strategy, the Five-Tone Tactics.

Thus, by mastering every secret and exhausting the Way to its end, he ascended riding the dragon, and joined Heaven and Earth in boundless eternity.

The Scriptures of Immortals say both the Yellow Emperor and Laozi served the Lord of Grand Unity and received His formula.

How then could anyone lesser than they become immortal without study? Never has it been heard."

4. The Tomb of the Yellow Emperor

Someone asked:

"If the Yellow Emperor became immortal, why does he have a tomb at Qiaoshan?"

Bao Puzi replied:

"According to the Classic of Mount Jing and the Record of Dragon's Head, after the Yellow Emperor took the divine elixir, a dragon came to carry him away.

His ministers, grief-stricken, took his staff or garments, built temples, and made offerings.

Some say he ascended and later returned, that when his tomb was opened, the body was gone and only his sword and shoes remained.

These accounts differ, but all affirm his transcendence.

The Daoist and the hundred schools all record that the Yellow Emperor became immortal, only the Confucians deny it, not because they know otherwise, but because they feared the people would abandon propriety and chase immortality.

Therefore they said ‘he died’ to quiet the populace.

Just as people build shrines for virtuous officials after death.

It proves reverence, not mortality.

So too with the tomb of the Yellow Emperor, it cannot prove he died.”

5. On Pengzu and Anqi Sheng

Someone asked:

“Pengzu lived eight hundred years, Anqi Sheng three thousand. They far exceeded men, yet still died.

Does this not prove that lifespan is fixed and cannot be extended?”

Bao Puzi replied:

“The Book of Pengzu says he served from Emperor Ku through the Yin dynasty.

When the Yin king sought his secrets of the chamber arts and found them efficacious, he tried to kill Pengzu to keep them from spreading.

Pengzu discovered this and fled, at that time he was already over eight hundred, not dead at all.

Later disciples saw him west of the desert seventy years after his disappearance.

The Annals of Immortals and Records of Liu Xiang both call him an immortal.

As for Anqi Sheng, he sold medicines on the seashore.

The people of Langya saw him for generations, over a thousand years.

When Qin Shi Huang summoned him, they spoke for three days and nights.

His words were vast, his arguments sound.

The emperor, though skeptical of gods, was convinced and rewarded him richly.

Anqi left behind a note saying he would return after a thousand years and could be sought on Mount Penglai.

This shows he did not die.

If his teachings had been false, the harsh and ruthless First Emperor would surely have slain him.

How then would he have been rewarded?”

6. On Those Who Practice but Still Die

Someone asked:

“There are people who take elixirs and practice breathing exercises yet still die. Why?”

Bao Puzi replied:

“Because they never obtain the True Golden Elixir.

Those who only take herbs or practice minor arts may prolong life, not achieve immortality.

Some know herbal medicine but not rejuvenation.

Some practice without understanding divine seals and taboos.

Some invoke no spirits, guard no unity, and so are killed by ghosts or poisons.

Others enter mountains wrongly and anger the mountain gods, who send beasts, serpents, or mists to harm them.

Some begin too late, their bodies already damaged.

Restoration fails before the root is secure.

Old men sometimes succeed, young ones sometimes fail because it depends on how much primordial qi they received at birth.

Life is like a tree: if the roots are deep, it lives; if shallow, it withers though watered well.

So too man, easily harmed, hard to heal.

Those who exhaust themselves early cannot live long.

The great principle is:
‘To nourish life, avoid injury.’

As Shennong said:
‘If all diseases are cured, long life will follow.’
Truly so.”

7-8. On the Causes of Injury and the Discipline of Life

Someone asked:
“Are these injuries mainly from lust?”

Bao Puzi said:
“Not lust alone.

All excess harms life.

The key to longevity lies in the Way of Returning the Years.

The superior man knows it and attains renewal of youth.
The lesser man, at least, avoids self-destruction.

If one begins young and practices returning the vital essence, nourishing the brain with the Jade Elixir from the valleys, even without medicines he may reach three hundred years, though not immortality.

Those ignorant of the method are like cups of ice holding boiling water.

Overthinking beyond one's capacity injures.

Labor beyond one's strength injures.

Grief, joy, ambition, speech, fatigue, intoxication, overeating, even prolonged sitting or lying, all injure.

Thus the rules of health are:

Spit not far; walk not hastily.

Do not stare long; do not listen too intently.

Rise early, sleep timely.

Eat before extreme hunger, stop before fullness.

Drink before thirst, but not to excess.

Avoid overwork and over-rest, avoid heat and cold extremes, avoid exposure to wind, frost, fog, and dew.

The five flavors must not be excessive:

Too much sour harms the spleen, too much bitter harms the lungs, yoo much spicy harms the liver, too much salty harms the heart, too much sweet harms the kidneys.

All injury is gradual, the fool feels nothing until life is shortened.

Therefore the wise live by harmony with the seasons, moderate labor and rest, control anger to preserve yin, restrain joy to nourish yang.

First heal deficiency with herbs, then secure eternity with gold and cinnabar.

Therein lies the full art of long life.

But those who scoff at this Way, who indulge in lust, luxury, and passion, cannot be taught.

Speaking to them is like offering mirrors to the blind, or music to the deaf.”

Chapter 14 - On Diligent Seeking (勤求)

1. The Need for Earnest Seeking

Bao Puzi said:

“The greatest virtue of Heaven and Earth is life and life delights in nourishing all things.

Therefore, the most secret and revered art of the Daoist tradition is none other than the method of attaining long life.

For this reason, it is transmitted only under a blood oath, and to teach the unworthy is to invite Heaven’s punishment.

Hence the masters dare not transmit it lightly.

Only to those who seek earnestly and prove steadfast after long trials do they reveal its essentials.

How could one who does not love the Way, who does not seek it deeply, expect others to proclaim it publicly or sell it like common goods?

Those whose destiny does not accord with the immortal path,even if they saw immortals walking before them in the streets would still say, ‘These are beings of another kind’, or ‘They are ghosts, illusions, or accidents of nature.’.

Even if Red Pine or Wang Qiao themselves pulled their ears and spoke to them, they would still call it deception.

Yet there are a few who believe and even among them, most fail because they do not seek diligently for a true teacher.

Enlightened masters are rare, not because the Way has vanished, but because men do not seek widely or sincerely.

Those who are destined to attain it will inevitably meet the right teacher.

There have been seekers who searched and failed, but none who failed to seek and yet succeeded.

Today, the world abounds with frauds, impostors who steal the title of "Daoist" and deceive for profit.

They have some surface knowledge, enough to attract the naïve.

Many are misled, restrained by these charlatans, who say, 'The Way ends with me, there is nothing more.'.

They thus block the path of sincere aspirants, a cause for deep sorrow.

Others, hearing of those who can melt stones, fly through the air, or transmute cinnabar and jade, dismiss them, saying: 'Only Red Pine or Wang Qiao could do that. Any man who claims to know it now is a liar.'.

Thus shallow minds destroy faith in others, and no longer strive to seek.

Alas! Time rushes by like a gale, in an instant youth fades and old age arrives.

Even a hundred-year life, thirty-six thousand days, half is spent in ignorance and half in frailty.

Subtract childhood, illness, and sorrow, how many peaceful days remain?

Few indeed.

A saying goes:

‘Each day a man lives, a day is lost; like cattle driven to slaughter, each step is closer to death.’

Harsh words, but true.

Those who claim not to fear death do not truly understand life, they only lack the means to escape death.

Confucius mourned his friends, King Ji offered his own life for another.

Even sages did not rejoice in dying.

Later men boast of “equating life and death,” quoting Zhuangzi’s dream, yet when ill, they still seek medicine; when endangered, they tremble with fear.

They study paradox and clever speech, calling it ‘the learning of Lao and Zhuang,’ while scorning true methods of cultivation.

They praise the turtle that refuses the net, yet forget that Zhuangzi himself begged grain from the River Marquis when hungry.

How can such men truly transcend life and death?

Think. After death one enters the long dark, the worms feast, the body merges with dust.

How could any person not shudder?

If the heart truly desires life, should one not cast aside trivial affairs and cultivate the profound?

Yet even those who believe are hindered by worldly attachments.

They practice half-heartedly, in spare hours, and thus seldom succeed.

The wise first pursue longevity.

Once long life is secured, all things follow at will.

Even if one becomes merely an Earthly Immortal like Pengzu or Laozi, living hundreds of years in joy before ascending.

That too is a great triumph.

But a worthy teacher is essential.

Without a true master, success is impossible.”

Bao Puzi then recounts examples of emperors honoring Confucian teachers with gold and titles for mere words, yet seekers of immortality scorn humbling themselves before a living immortal master.

He concludes:

“If men can kneel to those who only teach the words of the dead, how can they be too proud to bow to one who teaches the art of not dying?

To despise humility is to bar oneself from the Dao.”

2. On True Teachers and False Paths

“In ancient times, people were simple and sincere.

Rulers disdained rhetoric, and adepts valued practice over speech.

Today the world prizes ornament and verbosity, writings multiply without end.

Yet the true key to immortality remains unwritten, transmitted only from mouth to ear.

The secret may be no longer than a hand’s breadth, hidden in a sash.

Only those who serve the master for years, enduring tests and trials, may receive it.

Most so-called disciples merely get scraps, small recipes to avoid death but not to transcend it.

Thus, among a million Daoists, scarcely one knows the true Golden Elixir.

Many think immortality lies in worship, offerings, or prayers, but long life depends on the Great Medicine, not on sacrifice.

Qin and Han kings spent fortunes on prayers to the gods and gained nothing.

How much less can a common man, lacking virtue and cultivation, bribe Heaven with meat and wine?

Others waste years chanting books they do not need, spending wealth on ceremonies, yet never seek a real master.

If the effort and cost they wasted on empty rites were used to find a true teacher and refine real elixirs, they would surely attain immortality.

To seek the Dao wrongly is like traveling to Chu while the road leads to Yan.

The horse may be swift, but it will never arrive."

3. On False Daoists and Jealous Teachers

"Many fake Daoists are skilled at deception.

They pretend knowledge, hide ignorance, and envy those who truly have the Way.

Fearing others will surpass them, they slander the real adepts.

Their hearts are full of jealousy and greed, they crave disciples for wealth and flattery.

They praise and blame like politicians, make allies and enemies by their tongues, and poison sincerity with hidden malice.

Heaven and men alike despise them, misfortune surely follows.

Even for the smallest craft - archery, farming, music.

One must learn from a teacher.

How much more for the art of saving one's life?

Yet these men are too proud to ask and too vain to learn, perishing in ignorance and never repenting.

To such I speak not for blame but out of pity, for they are like infants falling into a well."

4. On False Shame and True Urgency

"If a man condemned to death could be saved by bowing low and serving humbly, would he refuse out of pride?

Yet ordinary Daoists, lacking the Golden Elixir, though they can summon spirits and see a thousand li, still must die.

They refuse to kneel and learn from those above them, ashamed to bow for a day, but not ashamed to perish forever.

To despise humility is to prefer the fire to escape, to drown rather than swim.

All would call such a man a fool."

5. On Why He Writes So Frankly

"The world is full of elegant writings about emptiness, but few speak plainly of the real steps toward immortality.

My words are sharp and direct, not for fame, but to awaken those lost in delusion.

The fool may hate my tone, but the wise will see that harsh medicine heals."

6. The Final Appeal

"Many who study life-cultivation fail because they find poor teachers.

Later seekers, seeing their failure, conclude falsely that the Way does not exist.

But immortality can be learned, as surely as grain can be planted.

No harvest without sowing, no longevity without diligence.”

Chapter 15 - Miscellaneous Responses (雜應)

1. On Grain Abstention (斷穀)

Someone asked:

“Can one attain long life by abstaining from grains?

How many methods exist, and which is best?”

Bao Puzi replied:

“Abstaining from grains (斷穀) only saves the expense of food, it cannot by itself make one immortal.

Those who have practiced it for long say they suffer less sickness than when they ate grains.

If they combine it with the use of elixirs, such as huangjing (Polygonatum), yuyuliang pills, and others taken twice a day for three days, they gain great vigor, can carry heavy loads, and walk long distances without fatigue.

Those who live on mineral drugs or breathe qi alone surviving five or ten years without food are indeed freed from hunger, but their bodies are weak and unfit for labor.

The Daoist texts say:

“If you would live long, keep the bowels clear.

If you would not die, let no filth remain within.”

And they also say:

“Grass-eaters are swift but dull.

Flesh-eaters are strong but violent.

Grain-eaters are wise but short-lived.

Qi-eaters are divine and deathless.”

These sayings belong to a single school of qi-cultivators, not to be taken as absolute.

Before taking the Great Elixir, one should fast from grain for a hundred days if possible.

If not, one may still take it, only the attainment of immortality will be delayed slightly.

In times of famine or when hiding in mountains, this method can save life, but otherwise there is little urgency to abandon food completely.

Merely giving up meat while still smelling its aroma stirs desire in the heart. Unless one truly leaves home and lives in caves, it is better to eat moderately than to fast to suffering.

There are over a hundred variations of fasting:

Some take stone pills to stave off hunger for fifty days.

Others chew pine, fir, or Dioscorea roots.

Some eat white stones boiled with certain powders.

One method says, eat a great feast, then take a pill to stop digestion. It preserves the meal undigested, feeding the body for years.

When returning to food, swallow mallow seed and pork fat to purge it out unharmed.

Daoist Dong Weilian of Luoyang once lived for years without food.

He taught a recipe using licorice, saposhnikovia, and amaranth seeds ground together.

Take a spoonful, swallow twelve small stones the size of sparrow eggs, and hunger ceases for a hundred days.

When ready to eat again, take mallow-seed soup to dissolve the stones.

Some soften stones using “Red Dragon Blood” and “Blue Dragon Paste,” made from cinnabar and azurite water; the stones become edible and strengthen vitality.

Others boil white stones in water mixed with an “Attracting Stone Powder,” which makes them soft like taro, eaten instead of grain.

Master Zhang Taiyuan and dozens of disciples lived in seclusion for ten years using this method.

All remained healthy and robust.

Yet the best of these is still inferior to the Great Elixir.

There are also those who practice breathing the qi of the twelve hours inhaling the green qi of Jupiter in spring, the red of Mars in summer, the yellow of Saturn in the four intercalary months, the white of Venus in autumn, and the black of Mercury in winter. Each strengthening its corresponding organ.

One may also swallow the essence of the six Wu days, facing the proper direction of the earth's branch each time.

Others summon the six Jia and six Ding Jade Maidens, or meditate on the spirit within the spleen named Huang Shangzi, drawing inner qi as nourishment.

I have seen several who fasted for two or three years, remaining light, healthy, and untroubled by cold, heat, or damp.

True, I have not seen one who went decades without eating, but since ordinary men die after ten days without food, and these endure for years unharmed, why doubt that it may last long?

Most report that strength declines at first but increases month by month.

Thus it is possible to continue indefinitely.

All who attain longevity rely on breathing and elixirs, never one alone.

Those who use talisman-water or pure qi alone grow weak for forty days, then become strong again.

Master Zheng once fasted for two years in Tongshan, saying that after long fasting he could drink many measures of wine without drunkenness, a sign of bodily resistance and immunity to disease.

When I asked how he obtained wine in the mountains, he said

he made "Cloud Liquor" from rice and herbs. One pill could ferment a whole jar instantly.

Thus, fasting and elixirs complement one another. Fasting alone does not extend life."

2. On Avoiding Cold

"On the first day of Winter, take the talismans of the six Bing and six Ding days, or circulate the Five-Fire qi 1,200 times, then you will not feel cold all winter.

Drinking 'Solar Wine,' or taking orpiment and cinnabar pills, also brings warmth.

Yet none of these aid longevity, they only guard against cold."

3. On Avoiding Heat

"At the start of Summer, take the talismans of the six Ren and six Gui days, or breathe the qi of the six Gui.

Or take the 'Dark Ice Pill' or the 'Flying Frost Powder', made from certain mountain barks and black serpent blood of the fifth day of the fifth month.

Few can obtain these ingredients.

Only You Bozi and Wang Zhongdu mastered them, they could wear heavy furs under ten furnaces of fire in midsummer and never sweat."

4. On Protection from Weapons

“The Grand Emperor of Wu once learned from Master Jie that merely writing the characters of the Big Dipper and Sun-Moon could avert blades.

He tested dozens of men, all survived countless battles unharmed.

Master Zheng said even reciting the names of weapons grants protection.

Knife is Great Chamber, ruled by Xu star.

Bow is Curved Tension, ruled by Di star.

Arrow is Wandering, ruled by Mars.

Sword is Lost Injury, ruled by Jiao star.

Crossbow is Far Gaze, ruled by Zhang star.

Halberd is Great General, ruled by Shen star.

One should secretly chant these in battle.

Or wear Red Spirit talismans made on the fifth day of the fifth month, or talismans of the Vermilion Bird, the South Pole Star, or the Queen Mother of the West.

Each averts weapons when properly empowered.”

5. On Invisibility and Transformation

“The divine arts of disappearance and form-shifting are fivefold.

They have no use for extending life, but may serve to escape danger.

One may rub the body with certain elixirs, or hold the Grass of Separation, or take refuge under the spirits of the six Ding, or enter bamboo groves with Heaven's Pivot soil, and thus vanish from sight.

Some can become birds, beasts, plants, or stones.

These are partial transformations, not true invisibility."

6. On Escaping Bonds

"When the Wei emperor captured Zuo Yuanfang, he was shackled, yet the fetters fell away.

I cannot be certain what method he used.

Texts mention many ways.

Swallowing Coix seeds thrice monthly with yin elixir, or using lightning stones, dragon's eggs, or talismans of heaven's writing.

All can loosen bonds.

But Zuo's transformations were infinite.

He likely used the Six Jia arts of metamorphosis, so that his true body could not be seized."

7. On Sickness

“Those who cultivate life fully taking divine elixirs, practicing breath, moving the qi daily, moderating sex and food, avoiding dampness and strain can remain free of illness.

But those who live among people, distracted and lazy, inevitably fall sick.

Even Daoists must study medicine.

Those who neglect it, relying only on spells, suffer needlessly and die untimely.

I have compiled The Jade Casket Formulas in one hundred scrolls, clearly organized, simple, and effective, unlike the jumbled collections of others.

A household owning this book will scarcely need physicians.”

8-9. On Knowing Future Events

“There are countless arts of divination - astrology, geomancy, omens, turtle-shells, divining stalks.

All are low techniques, laborious and unreliable.

But when one can summon spirits within stillness, seeing all things without leaving one’s tent, this is divine vision.

By calling upon the Spirits of the Five Peaks, or the Lords of Fate and Danger, one may inquire and know all fortunes.

Through mirrors, talismans, or summoning Jade Maidens, one may see distant events or divine teachers.

But such practice requires great purity and solitude.

When the true form of Laozi appears, yellow in color, nine feet tall, with radiant eyes and a crown of clouds then one's years are extended and all knowledge opens."

10. On Strengthening the Teeth

"Rinse the mouth with 'Sweet Dew' and 'Cinnabar Wine' each morning, and strike the teeth three hundred times, they will never loosen.

If already loose, use rehmannia decoction or alum pills.

Lingfei Powder even makes lost teeth regrow."

11. On Sharpening Hearing

"By practicing the animal movements - Dragon guiding Tiger, Bear stretching, Turtle swallowing, one can preserve hearing.

For deafness, fumigate the ears with black tortoise, or plug with wolfbane, sheep dung, and cinnamon hair/fuzz, these cure it."

12. On Brightening the Eyes

"By drawing the fire of the Heart to the eyes, washing with 'Bright Stone,' and using sun-light infusions, one may see at night.

Decoctions of turnip seed, dog gall, berberine, or mother-of-pearl also work.”

13. On Traveling Without Fatigue

“Those who take great elixirs become light and tireless.

Beginners should soak their feet with cloud-pearl powders, or take tiger-gall pills and cinnabar wine to strengthen the sinews.

For extreme travel, there exist ‘flying sandals’ (蹻) of three types - Dragon, Tiger, and Deer, allowing one to travel thousands of li a day by concentration.

Yet they must observe taboos strictly, or risk falling from the air.”

14. On Avoiding Plagues

“When great epidemics arise in the metal or wood years, visualize your body as the Five Jades.

Green in spring, red in summer, yellow in late season, white in autumn, black in winter.

Imagine a golden crown on your head, your heart flaming like the sun, and starlight woven into your hair.

Envision the Five-Organ qi emerging as colored vapors around you, then even sleeping beside the diseased, you will not be infected.

Supplement this by swallowing talismans or pills such as ‘Ghost-Shooting Pill’, ‘Red Chariot Messenger Pill’, ‘Crown-General Pill’, or ‘Jade-Casket Powder’.

All are proven remedies for plague.”

Chapter 16 - On Yellow and White (黃白)

1.Gold and Silver

Baopuzi said:

The Scripture of the Divine Immortals on the Yellow and White comprised twenty-five scrolls, containing more than a thousand formulas.

The Yellow is Gold, the White is Silver.

The ancients veiled and treasured these arts, unwilling to name them openly, therefore they spoke in concealment.

Some chapters were titled “Geng” and “Xin”, both signs of Metal, their true nature hidden within.

Yet most of these writings are profoundly obscure, and those that can be clearly understood are but few.

People of the world doubt these teachings as if they were empty tales, no different from those who deny the existence of immortals.

In former times I studied under Master Zheng, receiving from him the Nine Elixirs and the Canon of the Golden and Silver Liquids.

Later I also sought from him the Five Scrolls of the Yellow and White Middle Scripture.

Master Zheng told me that he once joined Master Zuo in the Copper Mountains of Lujiang to test the art, and that all the works succeeded.

Yet the fasting, purity, and arduous discipline required were no less than those for compounding the divine elixirs of immortality.

The common people mock me for pursuing heterodox paths, saying I force my will to penetrate that which cannot be known.

But why should I be so?

If my desire were merely to leave ornate words for later ages, my outer treatises and miscellaneous essays, more than two hundred scrolls would suffice.

This Inner Book speaks only directly, without embellishment.

I know well that to speak of such matters is to invite the world's derision, for men delight in discourses near to vulgar life, not in the distant and profound.

Yet I cannot cease, I have witnessed their efficacy, and the masters from whom I learned were not men of idle speech.

Though I live in poverty and hardship, beset by misfortune, unable to obtain the materials because the roads are broken and medicines scarce, still I record what I know, that later seekers of the True and the Marvelous may find my words and discern the Way within them.

The arts of transformation have no bounds.

That which is manifest may be hidden, and that which is hidden may appear.

Those who can wield such arts are many.

Water and fire dwell in Heaven, yet men draw them forth with the burning lens and the drilling of wood.

Lead is white in nature, yet by art it becomes cinnabar. Cinnabar is red in nature, yet by art it becomes lead again.

Clouds, rain, frost, and snow, all are the breaths of Heaven and Earth. Through medicines they may be reproduced, differing not from the real.

Among the beasts and crawling creatures, each has its fixed form, yet they too can swiftly alter and become other kinds, in endless varieties beyond count.

Humans are the most spiritual of beings, yet men and women may change form into cranes and stones, tigers and apes, sand and turtles. This is not rare.

High mountains sink into deep pools, deep valleys rise into hills. This too is the transformation of great things.

Transformation is the natural work of Heaven and Earth, why then should Gold and Silver alone not be made from other substances?

The fire born of the sun's mirror and the water drawn from the moon's lens are in truth no different from ordinary fire and water.

The serpent that becomes a dragon, the reed turned to grease, these are natural metamorphoses.

Their origins arise from spontaneous responses of nature.

Unless one has exhausted principle and penetrated essence, he cannot know their end and beginning.

Those of narrow sight, trapped within their own burrows, dismiss what they cannot measure, calling divine transformation empty illusion because Zhou and Kong did not speak of it and the old Classics did not record it, how shallow such thinking is!

The vulgar say Liu Xiang tried to make gold and failed, therefore the Way does not exist.

This is as foolish as saying, because a farmer's field once withered in drought, that the five grains cannot be planted at all.

The Prefect of Chengdu, Wu Dawen, a man learned and discerning, once told how he met a Daoist, Li Gen, who melted lead and tin, and dropped into the crucible a pellet of medicine no larger than a bean, when stirred with an iron spoon, it cooled into pure silver.

Wu obtained the secret formula, yet though he prepared for a hundred days of purification, official duties delayed him, and he never accomplished it.

He would sigh that the affairs of the world leave no leisure for the pursuit of the Real.

Huan Junshan also said “The eunuch Cheng Wei of Han loved the Art of the Yellow and White.

He married a woman from a family of adepts. Once, when he lamented his poverty, she asked, ‘Shall I bring you two bolts of silk?’ and the silk instantly appeared.

Wei had studied the Hongbao Pillow Book but failed to make gold.

His wife then went to him as he fanned the furnace, where mercury boiled in a tube.

She took from her pouch a small amount of medicine, cast it in, and within moments it turned to silver.

Wei was astonished. ‘The Way is so near you, yet you never told me!’

She answered, ‘The transmission of the Way must accord with destiny. When the destined one appears, I will teach him. If not, though torn limb from limb, my mouth shall stay silent.’.

Pressed again, she grew distraught, stripped herself, smeared with mud, and died.”

In recent times, Hua Lingsi, Prefect of Lujiang, a man of high talent and broad learning, doubted such matters.

Later a Daoist came teaching the Art of the Yellow and White.

He demonstrated by melting lead in an iron vessel, casting in a powder, and producing silver.

Melting the silver again with another drug, he made gold.

He also taught the art of “penetrant sight”.

After less than a hundred days, Hua at night perceived the stars and the houses of his neighbors as if no walls or fences stood between.

He even saw his dead concubine Yaohua appear and speak with him and when he worshiped in the ancestral hall, he heard the spirits answer his prayers.

Then Hua exclaimed, “Truly, there is nothing the world does not contain. Though the Five Classics record it not, we must not deny it by our own opinion.”.

Yet those unversed in the arts, hearing this, are struck with fear and wonder.

The art of the Yellow and White, like the compounding of divine elixirs, demands a hundred days or more of purity and fasting, and it must be practiced by one who understands both the text and its spirit, not by the unclean, the dull, or those untutored in the subtle arts.

Many parts require oral transmission; hence one must learn from a master, and do the work in a deep mountain, in a place of purity, hidden from the eyes of the vulgar.

Liu Xiang, attempting it within the palace, used palace women as attendants, how could it succeed?

Without seclusion, without abstinence from worldly affairs, it is impossible.

Even dyers of silk will not allow strangers to watch their work, for if seen it fails. How much more the transformations of Gold and Silver!

All things, great or small, depend upon grasping their essential method.

Without it, even common cookery cannot succeed, how much less so this Great Work.

Once I asked Master Zheng, “Laozi said, ‘Do not prize the goods that are hard to obtain.’

In the age of perfect governance, men cast gold into the mountains and jade into the valleys.

If so, why did the ancients still value gold and silver and yet preserve the art of making them?".

Master Zheng replied, "Laozi spoke of those who, driven by greed, tear mountains and dredge seas, traveling ten thousand li to seek ornaments, disturbing the people and wasting their lives to feed vain desires.

But the true man makes gold not for wealth, but to refine and ingest it, attaining immortality.

Thus the Scripture says - Gold may be made, the world may be transcended.

Silver too may be eaten, though it is not equal to gold.".

I said, "If so, why not take worldly gold and silver rather than forge new ones? Is not the latter deceit?".

He answered, "The gold of this world is fine indeed, yet Daoists are mostly poor.

Hence it is said 'Never has there been a fat immortal or a rich adept.'

Disciples number five or ten, how could they all afford the materials?

Thus they make them.

The gold thus created is the essence of many medicines, superior to that found in nature.

The Scripture of Immortals says, from the essence of cinnabar, gold is born.

In mountains where cinnabar occurs, gold is often beneath it.

When the work succeeds, the gold is true. Inward and outward the same, a hundred smeltings do not diminish it.

Such gold may be hammered into nails, proving its firmness.

This accords with the natural Way, what deceit is there?

Deceit is when men smear bronze with blue-green or wash silver with egg-white so that it appears as gold, outside changed, within false.

But the alchemical transformations are true throughout.”.

Natural mushrooms grow of themselves, yet the scriptures teach to plant five stones and five woods to cultivate the divine fungus, it arises and grants long life, no different from the wild.

The pheasant becomes a clam, the sparrow becomes a toad, all alike in the pattern of transformation.

Thus the Scripture of Immortals says -

When the flowing pearl is refined nine times, father and son speak no word. gold and silver form naturally.

And also -

Cinnabar refined into gold, those who eat it ascend as immortals.

Those who take fungus and practice breath-circulation live long.

Those who feed on herbs endure a thousand years and return.

Again, gold and silver may be made by art. Long life may be learned by study.

The Jade Records declare, all under Heaven may attain longevity. Hesitation alone prevents success.

When mercury is condensed, it becomes gold, hard enough to drive a nail.

The Bronze Pillar Scripture says, cinnabar may become gold. The River-Chariot may form silver. When established, both are true. The one who gains this Way may make his body immortal.

The Master of Yellow Mountain wrote -

Heaven and Earth contain gold. I can make it.

Two yellows and one red, and it forms instantly without doubt.

And in the Inscriptions on the Tortoise Shell -

My destiny lies with myself, not with Heaven. when the returning elixir becomes gold, its virtue endures ten thousand ages.

Can the ancients have lied?

The trouble is that those who know the Way are mostly poor, while the medicines are cheap yet found in distant lands, unattainable in chaotic times.

Common salt and brine once worthless are now dear, yet none can buy them.

The stone bile of the Qiang lands costs a thousand coins per pound and cannot be found.

Thus knowing the formulas is as useless as not knowing them.

Those who have the method lack means, those of wealth lack understanding.

And if they do understand, they do not believe.

Even those who believe already possess gold and silver and will not risk their treasures to purchase rare ingredients.

And even if the profit is vast, the austerity of the process deters them.

Moreover, without a master’s oral key, one must not attempt it lightly.

Even in medicine, the shallowest of arts, common formulas are guarded.

They speak of “the glue of the court concubine”, “the clay of the Sealed Lord”, “the wood-demon seed”, “the golden merchant’s fungus”, “the floating cloud dregs”, “the dragon’s robe powder”, “the night-glow bone”, “the hundred-flower nectar”, and the “fasting of Winter Zou”.

These are all near things, yet without the oral key one cannot know them, how much less the Art of the Yellow and White!

Those who can truly perform it conceal it not for greed of gain, but because once this art succeeds, one may achieve long life and longevity is the utmost Way, revered by the ancients.

For in the books of formulas, many ingredients share names with common things but are not the same.

“The Maiden by the River” is no woman, “The Master of Linyang” is no man.

“Surplus of Yu” is not grain, “Yao’s Liquor” is not water.

Yet the vulgar, seeing dragon-gall, tiger-palm, rooster-head, duck-foot, horse-hoof, dog-blood, rat-tail, or ox-knee, think them beasts and blood.

Seeing broken basins and crooked hooks, they think them iron tools.

Reading of “Envoy of the Hu-King”, “Waiting Wife”, or “Old Farmer”, they think them human names.

If they cannot even discern the near and plain herbs, how shall they understand the hidden and arcane?

That Liu Xiang failed to make gold is no wonder.

But once the essentials are known, even a common man may succeed. It needs not the talent of sages.

Liu Xiang was not dull, he simply lacked the transmitted key.

Now I will record the concise and verified method to bequeath it to later kindred minds.

The Method -

First, take male realgar(red realgar, not yellow assumably) from Wudu, red as a cock's comb, bright and without stone impurities, not less than five jin.

Grind it to powder and mix with ox-gall. boil until dry.

In a red-clay crucible holding one dou, spread a layer of salt-rock and orpiment powder three fen thick.

Add the realgar powder five fen thick, cover again with salt three fen thick.

Repeat this layering until full.

Add crushed charcoal kernels two cun(1 cun = 33mm) thick.

Seal the outer crucible with earthworm soil and rock-salt mud. Cover with another pot, coating all three cun thick, and let no air escape.

Dry it in the shade for one month.

Then fumigate with horse-dung fire for three days and nights. When cold, open it, and beat the bottom. Molten copper will flow like smelted metal.

Cast this copper into tubes to hold cinnabar-water.

Heat again with horse-dung fire for thirty days, open the furnace, and refine the gold obtained.

Use this gold to make new tubes. Fill again with cinnabar-water, heat for thirty days, open and grind.

Take two parts raw cinnabar and one part mercury, mix them and instantly they congeal into gold, bright, radiant, and fit to drive a nail.

2. Making the Water of Cinnabar (作丹砂水法)

To prepare the cinnabar water -

Take one jin (about 500 g) of refined cinnabar.

Place it within a fresh bamboo tube.

Add two liang (about 75 g) each of shidan (stone gall) and xiaoshi (nitre).

Cover the top and bottom with layers of these substances.

Seal the mouth of the bamboo with a lacquered bone pellet, and allow it to dry.

Then submerge it in strong bitter wine and bury it three chi (about one meter) deep in the earth.

After thirty days, it becomes a liquid, its color red, its taste bitter.

This is called cinnabar water.

3. The Method of the Master of the Golden Tower (金樓先生法)

(Received from Master Qinglin, for making yellow gold.)

First, forge tin into a square block, six inches wide and one inch two-tenths thick.

Mix red salt with ash-water until it has the consistency of mud, and coat the tin evenly to a thickness of one-tenth of an inch.

Place these coated blocks layer by layer in an earthen pot of red clay.

For every ten jin of tin, use four jin of red salt.

Seal the seams firmly.

Heat it over a fire of horse dung for thirty days.

When you open the furnace, the tin within will all appear as gray powder, and within it will be lumps like small beans, these are yellow gold.

Gather them into an earthen bowl and smelt them again with charcoal ten times, until they are pure.

From ten jin of tin, one obtains twenty liang of gold.

Only the earthen pots from Changsha, Guiyang, Yuzhang, and Nanhai can be used for this purpose, for the clay of those regions is naturally suitable.

The local people use such pots daily for cooking.

4. Making Red Salt (治作赤鹽法)

Take one jin of cold salt (sea salt), one jin of cold water stone (a form of rock alum), one jin of cold feather soot(burnt feathers?), and one jin of white alum.

Combine them all in an iron vessel, and heat with charcoal fire until they are completely melted.

When their color turns red, remove and store, this is called red salt.

It serves as a vital reagent for transforming tin into gold.

5. The Method of the Master of the Corner (角裏先生法)

(Transmitted from the Sage of Jiqiu, for transmuting gold.)

Take two parts of alum-stone water and place it in an iron vessel.

Add charcoal fire and bring it to boil.

Then add mercury in any amount desired, and stir until they harmonize.

Let it boil six or seven times, then pour it upon the ground, it will congeal into white silver.

Next, take one part of cinnabar water, one part of azurite water, and two parts of realgar water.

Place them in a vessel of beaten copper, apply gentle heat until they boil, stir repeatedly until blended, then increase the fire until boiling strong.

Put the previously made white silver into it, in any desired amount.

Let it boil six or seven times.

Pour it upon the ground to cool, it becomes purple-polished gold, of highest color.

6. Making Realgar Water (治作雄黃水法)

Take one jin of realgar (arsenic sulfide) and place it in a fresh bamboo tube.

Add two liang of xiaoshi (nitre).

Cover both ends, and seal the mouth with a lacquered bone pellet.

Submerge it in strong vinegar three chi deep underground.

After twenty days, it transforms entirely into a liquid, this is realgar water.

The method for making azurite water (zengqing shui) and alum water (fanshi shui) is the same, except that each must be placed in a separate tube.

7. The Child's Method for Making Gold (小兒作黃金法)

Fashion a large iron tube one foot and two inches in diameter and the same in height.

Fashion a smaller iron tube, six inches wide, polished smooth within.

Take one jin each of red stone earth, nitre, mica, and hematite, one-half jin of sulfur (liuhuang), four liang of azurite (kongqing) and one jin of condensed water-stone/alum (ning shuishi).

Grind all finely, sift, and mix with vinegar to make a paste.

Coat the inside of the smaller tube to a thickness of two-tenths of an inch.

Take one jin of mercury, one-half jin of cinnabar, and one-half jin of liangfei (refined lead).

To obtain liangfei, melt ten jin of lead in an iron cauldron over open flame, when molten, add three liang of mercury.

Those portions that rise early and can be scooped with an iron spoon, these are liangfei.

Stir until the mercury is completely absorbed.

Place this in the smaller tube, cover it with mica, and cap tightly with an iron lid.

Set the smaller tube within the larger, and pour molten lead into the large one until the small tube is immersed, leaving a space of half an inch from the top.

When the surface lead has melted evenly, use intense fire to heat it for three days and three nights.

It will form purple powder (zi fen).

Take ten jin of lead, melt in an iron vessel, and while molten add seven fangcun spoonfuls of this purple powder.

Stir together, it immediately becomes yellow gold.

To make white silver instead -

Place mercury in an iron vessel, add three inches or more of the purple powder, heat until they combine, and pour into water, it will instantly become silver.

8. The Method of Master Wucheng (務成子法)

Fashion an iron tube nine inches long and five inches wide.

Grind three jin of realgar and mix equal parts of earthworm soil (yinlou ni).

Combine to make a mud, and plaster it around the outside to a thickness of three inches, leaving an opening four inches across.

Add two he (about 40 mL) of cinnabar water, and place it above a fire of horse dung until thoroughly dry.

Then put it within a copper tube, seal the top with a copper lid, and cover all around with yellow sand, overlaid with heavy mud of earthworm soil, letting no air escape.

Place in a charcoal furnace with coals three inches deep.

When the tube mouth glows red, let it cool and open it and all the realgar essence will have descended into the copper tube.

Remove and repeat the process as before.

After three jin of realgar have thus been refined, mix the residues with yellow sand in equal parts and form into a furnace of any desired size.

When using it, place the furnace over the charcoal fire.

When it glows red, add mercury.

As the mercury moves, add lead into the center.

The yellow essence rises from the sides, joins in the middle, and when poured upon the ground it becomes gold.

When one has used one thousand five hundred jin of material, the power of the furnace is exhausted.

9. The Miraculous Properties of This Gold

The gold produced by this method should be steeped in red millet wine for one hundred days, then it becomes soft and malleable.

Taking one pellet the size of a small bean, thrice daily, until one jin has been consumed.

The three worms are subdued, corpses do not decay, and all diseases depart.

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the aged will return to the vigor of thirty years.

Fire will not burn, a hundred demons, poisons, cold, heat, wind, and damp will not penetrate.

After consuming three jin, one may walk upon water, the spirits of mountains and rivers will attend and guard him, his life will be coeval with Heaven and Earth.

If one boils a pellet with red grass and pig's blood and applies it to the corners of the eyes, one will see ghosts and things within the earth, and can write at night.

If smeared with the blood of a white sheep and cast into water, fish and dragons will instantly appear and may be caught.

If smeared with blue sheep blood and cock's blood and hung above a city gate, the city for one li around will not be struck by plague.

If applied to the foreheads of cattle, sheep, and livestock, they will not fall ill, and tigers and leopards will not attack them.

If mixed with tiger gall and snake fat, and a pellet thus made is hurled toward an enemy army on the day of the moon's growth, the army will fall into confusion, slay one another, and flee without cause.

If coated with ox blood and thrown into a well, the water will boil.

If cast into a flowing stream, the stream will flow backward a hundred paces.

If smeared with the blood of a white dog and thrown into a shrine or temple, the spirits therein will become visible and may be commanded.

If coated with rabbit blood and placed in the place of Six Yin (陰地), the Kitchen Jade Maidens will instantly appear, serving sixty or seventy attendants.

If anointed with carp gall and held while entering water, the waters will part one zhang (ten feet), and one may breathe and walk beneath the surface.

If boiled with purple amaranth and its juice swallowed, one may go a hundred days without hunger.

If cooked with mercy-stone and placed in the hair knot, and used to strike enemies, blades and arrows will turn aside. Those who shoot will have their arrows reverse against themselves.

If, on a gengxin day at the shen-you hour, one throws a pellet toward a tree in the western direction, the tree will wither that same day.

If one throws a pellet while performing the Yu-step toward tigers, wolves, or serpents, they will all die at once.

If one grinds a pellet and writes upon stone, it will enter the stone.

If upon gold, it will enter the gold.

If upon wood, it will enter the wood, the lines penetrating completely and impossible to erase.

If a person has newly died, and one places a pellet upon his throat and sprays water upon his face before a full night has passed, he will revive.

If one coats a pellet with fox blood and crane blood, places it beneath one's fingernail, and points toward the ten thousand things, then whatever one speaks will transform, mountains move, trees walk, and though people see it, the things themselves do not truly move.

Whenever one undertakes the Yellow and White, one must establish altars to the Supreme Unity (Taiyi), the Mysterious Maiden (Xuannü), and the Lord Lao (Laozi), perform offerings as in the rites for the Nine Elixirs, and keep incense of the Five Aromas burning without ceasing.

When the gold is complete, cast three jin into deep water, and one jin into the marketplace, only then may one freely use the rest.

Chapter 17 - Ascension and Travel (登涉)

1. The Principles of Entering Mountains

Someone asked about the Way of climbing mountains.

Bao Puzi said:

“All those who cultivate the Way, refine medicines, or seek to avoid the world’s chaos and dwell in seclusion. None can avoid entering mountains.

Yet those who do not know the correct methods of entering mountains often meet with misfortune and harm.

Hence the saying ‘Beneath Mount Taihua, white bones lie in heaps.’.

This refers to those who knew one aspect but not the whole, though they sought to preserve life, they instead hastened death.

Every mountain, great or small, possesses spirits and numinous beings. If the mountain is great, its spirit is great, if small, its spirit is small.

To enter mountains without technique brings peril.

One may suffer illness, injury, fright, and confusion.

One may see strange lights and shadows, or hear uncanny sounds.

Great trees may suddenly snap though no wind blows.

Or rocks fall of their own accord and crush men.

Or people may grow deluded and wander wildly, falling into ravines.

Or be attacked by tigers, wolves, or venomous insects.

Thus it is not to be done lightly.

The proper times to enter mountains are the third and ninth lunar months, these are the “open-mountain months”.

One should also choose an auspicious day and favorable hour within those months.

If necessity compels travel outside those times, at least select a lucky date.

Before entering, one must fast and purify for seven days, avoiding filth and defilement, and carry a Mountain-Ascent Talisman (Shengshan fu).

Upon leaving the house, perform the Three-Five Protection Ritual upon the whole body.

Moreover, the Five Sacred Peaks have years in which they are afflicted by calamity, just as the regions of the Nine Provinces rise and fall in fortune.

When they receive the visitation of destructive spirits or flying omens, the mountain’s divine ruler must not be approached.

According to the Register of Cities by Duke Zhou, every region of the realm has its “field of influence”. When disaster touches it, it may be avoided but not appeased.

This applies not only to dwellings, but to mountains as well.

There are also yearly taboos -

In years of Jia-Yi or Yin-Mao (Wood years), do not enter the Eastern Peak during the first or second month.

In Bing-Ding or Si-Wu (Fire years), do not enter the Southern Peak during the fourth or fifth month.

In Geng-Xin or Shen-You (Metal years), do not enter the Western Peak during the seventh or eighth month.

In Wu-Ji (Earth years), do not enter the Central Peak during the seasonal transition months.

In Ren-Gui or Hai-Zi (Water years), do not enter the Northern Peak during the tenth or eleventh month.

These prohibitions apply equally to Taihua, Huo, Heng, Tai, and Songgao Mountains.

Furthermore, all ancient creatures and spirits of great age can assume human form to confuse and test men.

They can disguise themselves perfectly, yet they cannot alter their true shape in a mirror.

Therefore, Taoists of old entering the mountains all carried a bright mirror at least nine inches wide, hung upon their back, thus the old monsters dared not approach.

If some being came to test them, they would look into the mirror.

If it were an immortal or a good mountain spirit, its reflection appeared human.

If a beast, ghost, or demon, its animal form would appear in the mirror.

If an old demon approached, it would retreat walking backward.

One could then turn the mirror behind and view it. If it were a demon, it would have no heels, if it had heels, it was a mountain spirit.

Once, Zhang Gai and Ou Gaocheng were practicing meditation in a stone chamber on Mount Yuntai in Shu.

Suddenly a man appeared before them, wearing a yellow hemp robe and a coir cap, saying “Ah, how you Taoists labor, dwelling in such hardship!”.

The two looked in their mirrors and saw a deer.

They asked, “You are an old deer of this mountain, how dare you assume human shape?”.

Before their words were done, the man turned into a deer and fled.

At the foot of Mount Linlü there was a pavilion haunted by ghosts.

Those who slept there often fell ill or died.

At night, several dozen figures, some yellow, some white, some black, male and female, would appear.

Later, a man named Zhi Boyi came to lodge there.

He lit candles and recited scriptures.

At midnight, more than ten people arrived and sat facing him, gambling and playing dice.

Boyi secretly shone a mirror upon them and saw they were all dogs.

He feigned clumsiness and let his candle's flame touch one's garment it smelled of burning fur.

He drew a small knife, stabbed one, which cried out as a man but died as a dog.

The rest fled, and the haunting ceased.

This was the mirror's power.

The adept who enters the mountains should carry the Inner Text of the Three Sovereigns and the True Shapes of the Five Peaks, so that he may summon the mountain spirits wherever he goes, and by consulting the Register of Ghosts, call upon the prefects and wardens of the mountain districts.

Then the monsters of wood and stone, and the spirits of mountains and streams, dare not approach to test him.

Next in rank, one may set up the Seventy-Two Spirit-Sealing Talismans, and inscribe the Red Official Seal of the Twelve Primordials, sealing the four directions of his dwelling, then no evil beings dare approach.

Or else hold the Eight Powers Scepter and wear Laozi's Jade Register, thus the mountain gods can be commanded and will not harm you.

I heard these things from Master Zheng, but could not fully learn their details.

My own master often said to his disciples, “He who seeks the Dao should be as anxious as one who fears poverty in his house or low rank in the court.

How could he fail to attain it?

What hinders men is not the Way’s difficulty, but the weakness of their resolve.

They seek what is near and forget what is far.

They are delighted when they hear the teaching, lean forward in eagerness, but before long forget it again.

The small gain is not secured before the great loss has already begun.

How can such a one comprehend the subtle and attain the supreme heights?”.

2. On Auspicious and Inauspicious Days for Entering Mountains

Bao Puzi said:

“The great taboos for entering mountains are -

First month, day of Wu (Horse).

Second month, day of Hai (Boar).

Third month, day of Shen (Monkey).

Fourth month, day of Xu (Dog).

Fifth month, day of Wei (Goat).

Sixth month, day of Mao (Rabbit).

Seventh month, day of Jiazi (Rat).

Eighth month, days of Shen and Zi (Monkey, Rat).

Ninth month, day of Yin (Tiger).

Tenth month, days of Chen and Wei (Dragon, Goat).

Eleventh month, day of Ji-Chou (Ox).

Twelfth month, day of Yin (Tiger).

Favorable days for entering mountains are:

Jiazi, Jiayin, Yihai, Yisi, Yi-Mao, Bingxu, Bingwu, Bingchen.

All these are greatly auspicious."

Bao Puzi also said:

"According to the Secret Records of the Nine Heavens and Taiyi's Hidden Cycles, the unlucky days of large months (30-day months) are the 3rd, 11th, 15th, 18th, 24th, 26th, and 30th days.

Of small months (29-day months) are the 1st, 5th, 13th, 16th, 26th, and 28th.

If one enters the mountains on such days, one will be tested by the mountain spirits.

What one seeks will not be obtained, and what one attempts will not succeed.

Not only for Taoists, but for ordinary people.

Entering mountains on such days brings misfortune and encounters with tigers, wolves, and poisonous creatures."

3. On the Hidden Mechanisms of Heaven and the Rites of Entry

Bao Puzi said:

“The workings of Heaven and Earth, and the auspices of Yin and Yang, vast and hard to define!

I will not assert they truly exist, nor dare to claim they do not.

Yet the Yellow Emperor and the Grand Duke both trusted in them.

In later ages, the learned men Yan Junping and Sima Qian likewise relied upon them.

The Classics record the regulation of calendars and the designation of strong and weak days.

The ancient saying goes, ‘The auspicious day is Wu.’.

From antiquity kings have appointed astrologers and historians to determine propitious times for investiture, sacrifices, and offerings to Heaven and Earth.

All chose their day carefully.

But the vulgar men of shallow talent, thinking themselves above convention, scorn to choose good days for their actions.

Are they not foolish indeed?

When one prepares to enter mountains and the heavenly and earthly influences are unfavorable, verification soon follows below, therefore one must not go lightly.

According to the Classic of the Jade Seal, one who wishes to enter sacred mountains must understand the secret art of Dunjia (the "Hidden Cycles").

The Lingbao Scripture likewise says:

'When entering mountains, one should act on the Protecting Day (Bao ri) or the Righteous Day (Yi ri).

The Commanding Day brings great fortune, but the Cutting and Attacking Days bring death.'

When I was young, I longed to enter the mountains.

Therefore I studied the books of Dunjia, accumulating more than sixty volumes.

The art is difficult to master quickly, so I made extracts of its essentials to carry with me in a pouch, not to be transmitted by writing.

Here I speak briefly:

Those who wish to enter mountains should first seek out someone who knows these arts.

Such people, though rare, have never been entirely lacking.

The Central Canon of Dunjia says:

"When one seeks the Dao, one should act on Heaven-Within Days and Heaven-Within Hours to subdue ghosts and apply talismans.

When one enters sacred mountains, act on Heaven-Bird Days and Heaven-Bird Hours, that tigers, wolves, poisonous creatures, and thieves will not dare approach.

The Six Gui are the Heavenly Repositories, the Six Ji are the Earthly Gates."

It also says:

“When one would flee the world and dwell in sacred mountains without worry, do so on the Ding-Mao Day of the Upper Prime called the Time of Hidden Virtue, also named Heaven’s Heart.

On that day one may vanish by day, and even the sun and moon will not reveal him; men and ghosts cannot see him.”

Again it says:

“Those who seek the Immortal Way and enter sacred mountains should do so on the Six Gui Day and Six Gui Hour, called the Heavenly Duke’s Day, then one shall transcend the world.”

And it further instructs:

“When about to enter mountain forests, pluck a sprig of grass from the left hand side, under the Azure Dragon star.

Break it in half and place it beneath the Constellation of Encountered Stars.

Step through the Bright Hall into the Greater Yin region, then walk using the Yu-Step (ritual pacing).

Recite three times the invocation:

‘O vast Great Yin, General who hears alone, I, descendant Wang Jia, forbid all outsiders to see me.

Let those who see me appear as bundles of firewood, and those who do not see me think I am no man.’

Place the halved grass on the ground, anoint the philtrum (under the nose) with earth taken by the left hand, hold another sprig in the right hand to conceal yourself, extend the left hand forward, and walk with the Yu-Step to the place of the Six Gui.

There hold your breath and stand still, then neither men nor ghosts can perceive you."

It also explains the symbols:

The Six Jia correspond to the Azure Dragon.

The Six Yi to the Encountered Stars.

The Six Bing to the Bright Hall.

The Six Ding to the Greater Yin.

The trigrams ䷾ (Water and Fire) combine to form the Already Completed Hexagram (Ji Ji).

The step count begins at one or two, not exceeding nine traces.

Each step measures seven feet, one foot equaling two zhang and one foot (21 feet).

One should glance back every nine traces.

The Yu-Step method:

Stand upright with the right foot forward, the left behind.

Next, move the right foot forward again, bringing the left to join it, that is one step.

Then advance the right again, then the left to meet it, that is two.

Continue thus three times, this completes the Yu-Step.

All arts of the world should know the Yu-Step, not only this one."

4. On the Celestial Logic of Auspicious and Inauspicious Days

Bao Puzi said:

"The Lingbao Scripture states:

'A "Treasure Day" (Bao ri) is one in which the Heavenly Stem produces the Earthly Branch.'

For example:

Jia-Wu and Yi-Si days.

Jia is Wood, Wu is Fire; Yi is Wood, Si is Fire, Fire is born from Wood.

A 'Righteous Day' (Yi ri) is when the Branch produces the Stem, such as Ren-Shen or Gui-You days.

Ren is Water, Shen is Metal; Gui is Water, You is Metal, Water is born from Metal.

A 'Restraining Day' (Zhi ri) is when the Stem overcomes the Branch, as Wu-Zi or Ji-Hai days.

Wu and Ji are Earth, Zi and Hai are Water, Earth conquers Water.

An 'Attacking Day' (Fa ri) is when the Branch overcomes the Stem, such as Jia-Shen and Yi-You.

Jia and Yi are Wood, Shen and You are Metal, Metal cuts Wood.

The rest follow this pattern and may be inferred accordingly."

5. On Invocations and the Six-Jia Secret Spell

Bao Puzi said:

"When entering sacred mountains, choose a Jiazi day of Opening and Removing (kai chu) aspect.

Hang strips of five-colored silk, each five inches long, upon a great stone.

Whatever is sought will surely be obtained.

Moreover, one should know the Six-Jia Secret Incantation (Liu Jia mi zhu):

Lin bing dou zhe, jie zhen lie qian xing(臨兵鬥者，皆陣列前行).

This formula of nine words should always be recited silently, there is nothing it does not dispel.

The Way that is simple and effective, needing no elaboration, this is what it means."

6. On the Forms of Mountain Spirits

Bao Puzi said:

"In the mountains dwell mountain sprites (shan jing).

Their form is like that of a small child with one leg, running backward.

They love to approach and assault people.

If, while in the mountains at night, one hears human voices shouting loudly, know this is called the Qi spirit.

If you call its name, it will not dare to harm you.

It is also known as Re-Nei. Calling either name suffices.

There is another mountain sprite, red like a drum, also one-legged, its name is Hui.

Others appear human, nine feet tall, clad in fur robe and straw hat, called Jinlei.

Some are like dragons with five-colored scales and red horns, called Fei-Fei.

Whenever one sees such beings, call them by their names, and they will not dare to cause harm."

7. On Strange Apparitions and Their Recognition

Bao Puzi said:

"Among the mountains are great trees that seem to speak.

It is not the trees themselves that speak, but a spirit within them called Yunyang.

If one greets it by name, it brings good fortune.

At night, when lights appear in the forest, they are caused by long-dead trees, do not be alarmed.

If one sees Hu people (barbarians) at night in the mountains, they are the essence of copper and iron.

If one sees Qin people, they are the essence of hundred-year trees.

Neither should be feared, they bring no harm.

If between mountain and stream you meet ghostly “officials”, they are called Si Jiao (“Four Patrols”).

Call them by name and it becomes auspicious.

If one sees a huge snake wearing a cap, its name is Shengqing, call it by name and it becomes auspicious.

If one hears ghostly voices calling incessantly yet sees no form, throw a white stone toward the sound, it will cease.

Another method - Make a spear of reed and thrust toward it, also auspicious.

If ghosts appear begging for food and calling without rest, throw bundled thatch(bai mao) at them, they die.

If ghosts cause travelers to lose their way, throw a reed staff at them, they perish likewise.

On a Yin day, should one meet a being calling itself “Forest Warden” (Yu-li), it is a tiger.

One claiming to be “Lord of the Path” is a wolf.

One claiming “Prefect” is an old raccoon-dog.

On a Mao day, one calling itself “Elder” is a hare.

One claiming to be the “Eastern King Father” is an elk.

One claiming the “Western Queen Mother” is a deer.

On a Chen day, one calling itself “Rain Master” is a dragon.

one calling itself “River Earl” is a fish.

one claiming “Viscount No-Intestines” is a crab.

On a Si day, one claiming “The Widow” is a temple serpen.

One claiming “Lord of the Seasons” is a turtle.

On a Wu day, one calling “Three Dukes” is a horse.

One claiming “Immortal” is an old tree.

On a Wei day, one calling “Master of the House” is a sheep.

One calling “Official” is a roe deer.

On a Shen day, one claiming “Ruler of Men” is a monkey.
One calling “Nine Ministers” is a gibbon.

On a You day, one claiming “General” is an old rooster.
One claiming “Thief-Catcher” is a pheasant.

On a Xu day, one giving a human surname or name is a dog.
One calling itself “Lord Chengyang” is a fox.

On a Hai day, one claiming “Divine Lord” is a pig.
One claiming “Woman” is a being of gold or jade.

On a Zi day, one calling itself “Lord of the Altar” is a rat.
One claiming “Divine Man” is a bat.

On a Chou day, one calling itself “Scholar” is an ox.

Once their true natures are known, they cannot harm you.”

8. On Preventing Snakebite and the Poison of Serpents

Someone asked about how to avoid snakes and vipers while dwelling in mountains and marshes.

Bao Puzi replied:

“In former times Mount Yuanqiu was full of great serpents yet also abounded with good herbs.

When the Yellow Emperor wished to climb it, Guangchengzi taught him to wear a talisman of realgar (xionghuang), and all the serpents fled.

Today, one should carry five ounces or more of realgar from Wudu, bright red like a cock’s comb, when entering mountains and forests, for then snakes will not approach.

If a man is bitten, apply a small amount of powdered realgar directly to the wound, he will be cured at once.

Among the many snake kinds, the most dangerous are the viper (fu she) and the blue-gold snake (qing jin she).

If untreated, a bite from either kills within a day.

Those who do not know the proper cure should cut away the bitten flesh and throw it to the ground, the flesh will hiss and smoke as if roasted, and the man will live.

During the seventh and eighth months, when the serpents’ venom is most intense, they sometimes bite bamboo or trees, which at once wither and blacken.

Therefore, those who seek the Dao and enter mountains should not only study great principles but also learn these defensive arts, this is no small matter.

Before going, practice the protection visualization.

Meditate upon the Sun and Moon, and the Vermilion Bird, Black Warrior, Azure Dragon, and White Tiger, forming a guard around your body.

Upon entering the forests, draw three breaths from the left, seal them, and blow them into the grasses of the mountain, envisioning the breath as a red mist filling the land for many li.

If you travel with companions, have each perform this blowing-of-qi together; even if they tread upon serpents, the snakes will not move, and one will scarcely see them at all.

Should a snake appear, again draw three breaths from the left toward the sun, lift the tongue to touch the palate, pinch the du gate with the fingers, close the heavenly gate and seal the earthly door.

Then press the snake's head with an object and encircle it with the hand, tracing on the ground a prison to contain it, thus it can even be captured or toyed with, and though it coil round the neck it will not bite.

Unless the spell is released, it cannot escape.

If another person is bitten, blow upon the wound with three breaths taken from the left, the pain will cease immediately.

Even from ten li away, one can heal another by calling his name, the man blessing the left hand for males, the right for females, and he will recover.

Master Jie's method -

When dwelling in the mountains, visualize five colored snakes, one of each hue, then seal the breath and pierce bamboo or wood boards with it, walking the Yu-step counter-clockwise.

Imagine thousands of centipedes covering the body like armor, thus one will never meet a snake.

Others bind dried ginger and aconite to the elbows or burn horns of cattle, sheep, or deer and fumigate the body.

Or wear Wang Fangping's realgar pills or place waxy dirt from a pig's ear mixed with musk under the toenails, all are effective.

Musk and wild boars both devour snakes, hence they repel them.

Likewise the sun-bird and ying turtle eat serpents, so southerners carry a piece of ying-turtle tail or sun-bird beak as protection.

If one is bitten, scrape these substances and apply them to the wound, it heals instantly.

Southerners also keep a live centipede in a bamboo tube.

When a snake is near, the centipede stirs, warning them to look carefully and indeed a snake will be found.

When giant snakes, more than a zhang long and as thick as a man's waist, meet centipedes, the latter can slay them with their breath. The serpent flees into deep waters, but the centipede floats upon the surface and subdues it.

The centipede glows blue like silk as it sinks. moments later the serpent rises dead.

Thus southerners use powdered centipede to treat snake wounds, which heal at once."

9. On Avoiding the Poisons of the South

Someone asked:

"In the southern valleys there are many venomous and evil creatures, how can they be avoided?"

Bao Puzi replied:

"In the high plains of the Central States the earth-qi is pure and harmonious.

In the great mountains of the northern realm there are none of these creatures.

But in the lands of Wu and Chu, heat and dampness brew miasma, and even the sacred mountains Heng and Huo harbor much venom.

There is the short fox, also called yu, she-gong, or she-ying, a water insect shaped like a cicada, the size of a three-cup bowl.

It has wings but no eyes, keen hearing, and a crossbow-like bone in its mouth.

When it hears a human voice it shoots a puff of air like an arrow across the water.

If it strikes a person, sores erupt.

If it strikes the person's shadow, he still sickens, though sores do not at once appear.

Untreated, it kills within ten days, its illness like severe fever.

There is also the sand mite (sha shi), found on land and water.

After new rain or before dawn and dusk they attach to travelers, though rare under dry midday sun.

They are as small as the tip of a hair.

When they first touch a man, they burrow under the skin, causing red prickling pain.

If extracted with a needle, they appear crimson. If ignored, they travel through the flesh to the bone, wandering through the body and killing the host, akin to the yu insect.

Where such insects abound, upon returning each day one should scorch the whole body lightly with fire so that they fall away.

To ward them off, carry any of the following -

The Musk Pill of Eight Substances, the Passing-the-World Pill, the Life-Guarding Pill, the Jade-Flask Pill, the Rhinoceros-Horn Pill, the Seven-Star Pill, or shepherd's-purse (ji ni).

These all repel sand mites and short foxes.

If such medicines cannot be obtained, good natural musk alone suffices or pound realgar and garlic in equal parts into a pellet the size of an egg and wear it, also effective.

If already afflicted, apply this paste to the sore to heal it.

Drinking or anointing with red amaranth (chi xian) juice also cures it.

The roots of eggplant, hookvine, or kudzu, any of these singly, may be pounded and their juice drunk, one or two shēng(1 litre or ¼ gallon).

The she-gong hibernates in winter in mountain ravines.

After snowfall, search for it, its lair leaves snow unmelted, the air above steaming.

Dig a foot deep to find it. Dry it, grind it, and wear it to repel the insect in summer.

If a Taoist masters even one spell of prohibition (jin fa), or the Hundred Seals, and constantly maintains inner purity and unity of spirit, then all poisons dare not come near, needing no medicines at all."

10. On Guarding Against Cold and Damp in Mountain Dwellings

Someone asked:

"Taoists dwelling in mountains, nesting beneath rocks and cliffs,

cannot always enjoy warm bedding.

How can they not fear wind and damp? Teach me the method."

Bao Puzi replied:

"There are seven remedies -

The Golden Cake Powder, Three-Yang Elixir, Chang-Xin Pill, Strong-Grass Winter-End Decoction, Solitary-Shaking Balm, Mugwort-Mystic-Flower Powder, and Autumn Rehmannia Blood Pill.

All need be taken for no more than fifty days.

Thereafter one may go ten years without fear of wind or damp.

Those who take the great elixirs of gold and cinnabar, though not yet ascended to the heavens, their bodies no longer receive illness.

Even sleeping in wind and lying in wetness cannot harm them.

These seven medicines are for beginners on the Way.

Master Yao took only the Three-Yang Elixir and could lie naked upon ice without shivering.

Masters Jie and Liang Youdao lay upon bare rock through autumn and winter winds, these were proven and secret methods."

11.On Crossing Rivers and Seas, and Repelling Water Spirits

Someone asked:

"How can Taoists safely cross rivers or seas, avoiding snakes and dragons?"

Bao Puzi said:

"When one must travel across great waters, stand by the river and break a hen's egg, mix a little flour and fragrant powder into water, wash yourself in it, then fear neither waves nor dragons.

Also carry the Talisman of the Eastern Sea Youth, the Water-Controlling Talisman, and the Isle-of-Penglai Slip, all dispel water's evils.

There are also the Six-Jia Three-Metal Talisman and the Five-Wood Prohibitions.

When facing the river, recite this prayer:

'Rolling Reeds, Rolling Reeds!

River Earl, lead the way and repel the dragons.

Ten-thousand calamities vanish, the heavens become clear and bright.'

The Golden Register records -

On a Bing-Wu day of the fifth month at noon, pound the Five Stones - realgar, cinnabar, orpiment, alum, and azurite into powder.

Bathe the mixture in the Golden-Flower Pool, place it in the Six-One Spirit Furnace, and smelt it with cassia-wood fuel.

Let virgin boys and girls tend the fire.

From the resulting bronze, forge two swords.

The male sword of "stallion copper," the female of "mare copper," each five inches and a half long, the number of Earth.

Wear them when traveling over water, and dragons, great fish, and water-spirits will not dare approach.

To distinguish the coppers pour water on the molten metal as it glows red.

The piece that bulges upward is the male, the one that hollows inward is the female.

Engrave their names and keep them marked.

When entering water, wear the male on the left and the female on the right.

When only crossing by boat, on yang days wear the male, on yin days the female.

The Celestial Text of the Great Characters includes the Script of the Northern Emperor.

If copied on silk and worn, it also wards off storms, waves, dragons, and water creatures.”

12. The Mountain Entry Talisman

入山符

Bao Puzi said:

“These upper five talismans are those of Laozi for entering mountains.

Write them in cinnabar upon peach-wood boards, filling the surface completely.

Fix them above doorways, upon the four corners, and at the paths within fifty paces of one’s dwelling.

They ward off mountain demons and spirits.

Pillars and beams of the house may also bear them.

Whether one lives long in forests or merely passes through, all may use them; no creature then dares harm.

Three talismans may be joined upon one board.

The inscription ‘意謂爾非葛氏’ means: “These are of the lineage of Ge (Xianweng 葛仙翁).”

13. Another Talisman of Laozi

Bao Puzi said:

“This is likewise Laozi’s Mountain-Entry Talisman.

It may be placed upon pillars or beams.

All who dwell in forests or briefly enter mountains should employ it for safety.”

14. Chen An-shi’s Tiger-Repelling Talisman

Bao Puzi said:

“This talisman was transmitted by the Immortal Chen An-shi.

Write two in cinnabar upon silk, differing slightly.

Keep four at one’s residence, four to carry on journeys.

When moving elsewhere, collect and take them.

It is a great divine secret.

The Mountain-Opening Talisman uses the thousand-year vine to open the gates of sacred peaks, revealing hidden scriptures of gold and jade.

Though methods vary in form, their virtue is the same.”

15. The Divine Seal of Laozi

Bao Puzi said:

“This seal of Laozi subdues all spirits, snakes, vipers, tigers, wolves, and demons.

Carve it from the heartwood of jujube, two inches square.

Bow twice, then wear it.

Its efficacy is wondrous indeed.

It was the very talisman used by Immortal Chen An-shi.”

16. Amulets for Men and Beasts

入山佩带符

“These three talismans should also be affixed to the cowshed, the horses’ stable, before and behind, left and right, and to the pig-pen, to ward off tigers and wolves.”

17. On Walking upon Water and Dwelling beneath It

Someone asked:

“It is said that Tan Chang could walk upon water or remain long beneath it, by what art?”

Bao Puzi answered:

“Mix onion-juice with cassia; take seven pills the size of parasol-tree seeds, thrice daily for three years, then one may walk upon water.

Zheng Jun said by practicing breath-retention to a thousand breaths, in time one may remain beneath water for a whole day.

If one obtains a genuine Tong-tian xi horn at least three inches long, carve it into a fish shape and hold it in the mouth when entering water.

The waters will part three feet wide, allowing free breathing.

This horn, streaked with a red line from base to tip, is called Fright-Chicken Horn.

Place it amid grain, fowls dare not peck.

Set it upon stored grain and birds never alight.

On nights of heavy fog or dew, put it in the courtyard and no moisture will touch it.

The beast that bears it dwells deep in mountains; on dark nights its horn glows like fire.

Stir any poison broth with a fork made from this horn—the liquid froths white and the poison dies.

If it is pure, no froth appears, thus it tests for venom.

Travellers in lands of sorcery always stir food with it before eating.

If struck by a poisoned arrow, prick the wound with this fork, the poison bubbles out and the man recovers.

The Tong-tian xi eats only toxic herbs and thorned plants, never soft grasses;

yearly it sheds its horn between stones.

If a man fashions a wooden replica to match it, the beast, deceived, leaves the new horn there next year.

Other rhino horns also ward off evil and purge poisons, yet none equal this.

Or, one may ingest the Six-Wu Talisman for a thousand days;

or combine the red-spotted spider and the seven-layered water-horse into the Feng-yi Water-Spirit Pill—taking it allows dwelling beneath water.

Merely anointing the soles with it permits walking upon the surface.

Even the grime of the head can make iron float—how much more such marvels as these!”

18. On Warding Tigers and Fierce Beasts

Someone asked:

“Those who seek the Way dwell in wild mountains, where tigers and wolves abound, how may they be repelled?”

Bao Puzi replied:

“In ancient times mountain-goers all wore the Seal of the Yellow God’s Transcendent Charter, four inches square, inscribed with one hundred and twenty characters.

Seal mud upon the four quarters a hundred paces from one’s dwelling. Tigers and wolves will not enter.

When you meet fresh tiger tracks, stamp the seal forward, tiger flees. Stamp backward, tiger returns.

Carrying this seal through forests, one need not fear beasts.

It not only averts tigers and wolves: if there are malevolent gods of mountains, rivers, or temples that bring misfortune, sealing their paths with this mud cuts off their power.

At Shitou River there was a huge turtle haunting a deep pool, bringing illness to men.

The Taoist Dai Ying cast hundreds of these sealed clods into the pool.

After a while the giant turtle surfaced, unable to move; it was slain, and the sick recovered.

Smaller turtles also floated dead upon the shore.

If one suddenly meets a tiger, perform the Three-Five Prohibition, the beast instantly retreats.

(This method must be transmitted orally; writing cannot convey it.)

Another way: visualize yourself as the Vermilion Bird, three zhang tall, standing upon the tiger's head, and hold your breath, the tiger departs.

When lodging at night in mountains, secretly remove a hairpin, focus the breath, and pierce the White Tiger Star, then fear nothing.

Or grasp a knife in the left hand, seal the breath, and draw a square upon the ground, reciting:

"North of Heng Mountain, south of Tai Mountain.

Thieves do not rise, Tigers and wolves do not move.

Cities stand firm, I close with the Golden Gate.”

Then lay the knife crosswise, within ten days the White Tiger spirit cannot harm.

Or perform the Great Prohibition. Swallow three hundred and sixty breaths, draw from left to right, and shout, the tiger will not rise.

With this method one may roam the mountains unafraid.

Or use the Seven-Star Tiger Step, the Jade-Spirit Talisman, the Eight-Majesties Five-Victories Charm, Laozi’s Peace Talisman, the Central Yellow Canopy Seal Script, or Flowing-Stone Realgar Powder.

Burn horns of cattle or sheep or establish the Western Peak Mountain-Prohibition Charm, all are effective.

(Four further talismans are omitted.)”

19. The Final Laozi Mountain Talisman

“This talisman too is Laozi’s Mountain-Entry Charm.

Its instructions follow the text exactly.

It may also be affixed to inner pillars or beams.

All who dwell in forests or pass briefly through the mountains should employ it.”

20. The Final Mountain-Entry Talisman of Laozi

“This talisman is likewise the one Laozi used when entering mountains.

Its instructions follow the text precisely.

It may also be affixed upon the inner pillars or beams.

Whoever dwells long in forests, or only passes through for a short while, may employ it and all evils, spirits, and fierce beasts will not dare approach.”

Chapter 18 - The Reality of Earth (地真)

1. On Knowing the One

Bao Puzi said:

“I heard from my teacher: When a person knows the One, all things are accomplished.

He who knows the One, there is nothing he does not know.

He who knows not the One, there is nothing he can truly know.

The Way arises from the One, precious for having no equal.

It resides singly within Heaven, Earth, and Man, thus it is called the Three-Ones.

Heaven gains the One and becomes pure.

Earth gains the One and becomes tranquil.

Man gains the One and comes to life.

Spirit gains the One and becomes numinous.

Metal sinks and feathers float, mountains stand and rivers flow.

You cannot see it with sight nor hear it with hearing.

If you keep it present, it abides.

If you neglect it, it vanishes.

Facing toward it brings fortune.

Turning away brings misfortune.

Guarding it brings endless longevity.

Losing it brings exhaustion and decline of fate.

Laozi said vague and indistinct, within it there is an image. Indistinct and vague, within it there is a thing.

This refers to the One.

The Immortal Scriptures say:

“If you would live long, guard the One with clarity.

Think on the One when hungry, the One grants food.

Think on the One when thirsty, the One grants drink.”

The One has a name, a form, and a color.

In men it is nine fen long(3cm, 1inches); in women six(2cm, 2/3inch).

It may dwell two cun four fen(7.5ish cm, 3 inches) below the navel, the Lower Cinnabar Field(Lower dan tien, bladder or small intestines?).

Or beneath the heart, the Crimson Palace and Golden Gate(middle dan tien, heart or pancreas?).

Or between the eyebrows, one inch back lies the Bright Hall, two inches back the Cavern Chamber, three inches back the Upper Cinnabar Field.

This is the treasure of the Daoists, transmitted through generations by blood oath and mouth alone.

The One forms Yin and gives birth to Yang, governing the turns of cold and heat.

Spring gains the One and thus grows.

Summer gains the One and thus flourishes.

Autumn gains the One and thus gathers.

Winter gains the One and thus stores.

Its greatness cannot be measured by the Six Directions, its smallness cannot be compared to a speck of dust.

Long ago the Yellow Emperor journeyed east to Qingqiu, past Wind Mountain, where he met the Master of the Purple Palace and received the Inner Scriptures of the Three Sovereigns, by which to summon and command the myriad spirits.

Southward he reached Yuanlong under the Shade-Tree, viewing where all spirits ascend, gathering the flowers of Ruo-qian and drinking the waters of the Scarlet Peaks.

Westward he met Master Zhong-huang and received the Nine Repetitions Formula; passing Kongtong, he studied under Guangchengzi the Book of Naturalness.

Northward he climbed the Flooded Dike and Mount Juci, meeting Lord Da-wei and the boy Huang-gai, receiving the Diagram of Divine Mushrooms;

then ascended Mount Wangwu, obtaining the Golden Formula of Elixirs.

At Mount Emei he met the Celestial Emperor in the Jade Hall and asked of the Way of the True One.

The Emperor said:

“You already rule the four seas, yet still seek immortality, is that not greed?

I cannot fully explain its depth, I will merely hint.

For the methods of long life rely upon the Golden Elixir.

For preserving form and warding evil, there is only the True One, hence the ancients prized it.

The Immortal Scriptures state:

Nine-fold Elixir, Golden Liquid Canon, and the Formula of Guarding the One all lie within the Five Cities of Kunlun, sealed in jade caskets and golden slips, wrapped in purple mud and stamped with the Central Seal.

My master said:

“The One dwells in the Great Abyss at the North Pole, before it is the Bright Hall, behind it the Crimson Palace.

The canopies glitter, towers of gold rise high

The Left Rake and Right Dipper raise waves through the sky.

Black fungus veils the cliffs, red grasses entwine them.

White jade peaks shimmer, sun and moon hang their light.

It crosses Fire and passes Water, moves through the dark to the yellow, palaces intertwine, jeweled curtains glisten, dragons and tigers stand guard, spirits gather beside.

It gives nothing, yet all comes. Moves not, yet all is moved.

When one keeps leisure and composure, the One abides.

Guarding the One and preserving truth, one may commune with spirits.

With few desires and frugal food, the One stays within.

When the blade rests upon the neck, by thinking of the One, life returns.

To know the One is not hard, to keep it unbroken is hard.

He who keeps it and loses it not will be inexhaustible.

On land he repels fierce beasts, in water he drives off dragons.

Ghosts dare not near, weapons cannot wound.

This is the great outline of the True One."

2. On Guarding the One

Bao Puzi said:

"I heard from my teacher that within the Daoist scriptures there are thousands of methods of visualization and preservation which can ward off evil and protect the body, such as 'Concealing the Shadow', 'Hiding the Form', 'Guarding the Form from Birth', the Nine Transformations, Twelve Changes, and Twenty-Four Transmutations. Countless in number, all efficacious.

Yet these involve imagining thousands of forms for protection and greatly burden the mind.

But when one knows the Way of Guarding the One, all such methods are abandoned, thus the saying "He who knows the One, all things are done.".

The oral transmission of the True One is written in clear script. One must seal it with the blood of a white victim, receive it on a royal day, and bind it with white silk and silver contract.

If spoken lightly or passed on rashly, its spirit will not act.

When a man guards the One, the One in turn guards him.

Therefore blades find no point to pierce.

A hundred harms find no place to enter.

In ruin he finds success, in peril he alone is safe.

Whether in temples of ghosts, under forest mountains, in plague-stricken lands, tombs and graveyards, lairs of tigers and wolves, or dens of serpents and vipers, if he guards the One without neglect, all evils flee afar.

If he forgets and loses the One, the hundred spirits may harm him.

If he sleeps and is oppressed by nightmares, go out to the courtyard, gaze at the Auxiliary Star, and clasp the hands in the Holding the Solid posture, the demons vanish.

If in rainy weather, remain indoors and face north, visualizing the Auxiliary Star.

If surrounded by armies or bandits and no path to live, enter into the Yin of the Six Jia cycle, crouch and guard the One, no weapon can harm you.

He who guards the One may travel ten thousand li, enter war, cross great rivers, build houses or move dwellings, without divining days or consulting stars. He need not fear the Grand Year, the Lunar Commander, or any inauspicious deity.

He will never meet misfortune.

The worthies of old tried and proved this."

3. On the Mysterious One

Bao Puzi said:

"The Way of the Mysterious One is also an essential method, it wards all evils and equals the power of the True One.

My first Inner Chapter, called Expanding the Mystery, was written for this.

Guarding the Mysterious One is even easier than guarding the True One.

The True One has name, length, color, and aspect. The Mysterious One has only the sense of seeing it.

Seek it in the midst of the sun, this is what is meant by knowing the white yet guarding the black. such a one desires to die but cannot.

First, purify and fast for one hundred days; then you may wait to perceive it, usually within three or four days it is attained.

Once obtained and guarded, it never departs.

In guarding the Mysterious One, visualize your body dividing into three persons.

When the three appear, increase them again until there are dozens, all identical with yourself, visible or hidden at will.

Each has its own oral formula, this is called the Art of Division of Form.

Thus Zuo Jun and Ji Zi taught Ge Xianweng to appear in dozens of places in a single day.

One guest might speak with him indoors, another sees him at the gate, another sees him fishing by the water, none can tell which is the true master.

My teacher said - Guarding the One while cultivating the Mirror. When the Mirror's art is complete, one can divide into many bodies, all with identical appearance and clothing."

4. On Division of the Form

Bao Puzi said:

"My teacher said to attain long life, one must diligently take the Great Elixir.

To communicate with spirits, one must divide Form by Metal and Water.

When the Form divides, you will behold within yourself the three souls and seven spirits.

Heavenly and earthly deities will appear and speak, the gods of mountains and rivers will become your servants."

5. On Preserving Life and the Governance of the Body

Bao Puzi said:

"Life is precious, death is dreadful.

Yet those who nourish life and avoid death all begin in diligence and finish in constant vision.

After the Way is accomplished, nothing need be done.

Before it is accomplished, nothing may be left undone.

Gathering herbs and medicines, toiling in mountains and marshes, boiling and refining, all require effort.

Climbing dangerous cliffs and crossing streams, early and late unwearied, without firm resolve, none endure.

When the Golden Elixir nears completion, the ingredients require wealth.

One must farm, herd, or trade for years to gather it.

On the day of compounding, purify and cut off worldly affairs.

This is not easy. Add to it the practice of Guarding the One, warding evil and defending the body.

Like a ruler governing a kingdom, like a general awaiting the enemy.

Only thus can one achieve long life.

Those of great wisdom and broad ability, fit to govern the world, are suited to this art.

Petty minds, though willing, cannot persevere.

The body of one man is like the image of a state.

The chest and abdomen are the palace.

The limbs are the borders.

The joints and bones are the officials.

The spirit is the ruler.

The blood the ministers.

The breath the common people.

To govern the body is to govern the state.

Loving the people secures the nation.

Nourishing the breath preserves the body.

When the people scatter, the state perishes.

When the breath is exhausted, the body dies.

The dead cannot live again. The fallen state cannot stand.

Therefore the perfected man averts disaster before it arises, cures illness before it appears, treats while there is no trouble, not after it has gone too far.

The people are hard to nurture and easy to endanger.

The breath is hard to purify and easy to defile.

Thus he who understands power and virtue secures the altars.

He who cuts off desires and appetites strengthens the vital breath.

Then the True One abides, the Three and Seven spirits guard, a hundred evils are repelled, and life is prolonged."

6. On True One and the Great Medicine

Bao Puzi said:

"My teacher said:

When one has taken the Great Elixir, even if not yet ascended, no evil approaches.

If one merely takes herbs or the minor elixirs of the eight stones, these can only heal disease and extend life a little, not avert outer calamity.

Some are possessed by ghosts, some insulted by mountain spirits, some harmed by demons.

Only by guarding the True One can one be fearless before them.

Next is wearing divine talismans.

But if one knows neither guarding the One nor bearing talismans and yet seeks immortality, perilous indeed!

For when a house has four gates and three are closed, thieves may still enter.

How much more if all are open!”

Chapter 19 - Remote Survey / Distant Observation (遐覽)

1. The Seeker’s Question

Someone said:

“I have long been a man facing the wall, bound within the teachings of Confucian learning, knowing only the words of the Five Classics, Three Histories, and the hundred schools, delighting in ornate poetry and frivolous essays, writings of no benefit.

I have clung to these in vain for years.

Yet being born in a troubled age, when turmoil never ceases and war drums resound, learning and the arts are despised, effort is wasted.

My mind strained and exhausted, probing the subtle and the hidden, but I have gained no livelihood from it, nor escaped the furrows of the field.

Worse, it has drained my spirit and shortened my life.

My hair is turning white, my former ambition declining.

I wish to abandon confusion and seek the Way of Life, yet in haste I find no direction, as if to cross a great river with no ford in sight.

You, Master, have deeply studied both the ancient canons and the secret teachings.

I ask, how many Daoist scriptures exist in all?

Pray tell me their titles."

2. The Master's Response

Bao Puzi said:

"I too once suffered this same affliction.

In former days I was fortunate to meet the enlightened Master Zheng (鄭君), though I regret my dullness was unfit to pierce the heights of his wisdom.

At that time I was still young and shallow, though I served as one of his disciples sweeping and cleaning his hall, my intent was unfocused, worldly desires not yet gone.

Thus my gain was small, and I ever lamented it.

Zheng Jun was past eighty years of age.

Though his hair once white, in later years it turned black again, his color full and joyous.

He could still draw a heavy crossbow to a hundred paces, walk hundreds of li in a day, and drink two dou of wine without intoxication.

Whenever he climbed mountains, his body was light and agile.

Even the young could not keep pace.

His food and drink were like ordinary men's.

He did not appear to abstain from grains.

I asked his elder disciple Huang Zhang, who said:

‘Once Master Zheng was returning from Yuzhang, and in the Goudi marshes met fierce winds.

Ahead were said to be bandits.

His companions, fearing, urged delay, for provisions were short.

The Master shared out his own rice to feed them all, yet himself ate nothing and for fifty days felt no hunger.

None knew by what method.’

He wrote with a fine hand, better than youths.

He understood music deeply and played the zither skillfully.

When seated, disciples gathered about him.

He would answer their questions while directing musicians on tempo and measure without a single error.

When I later joined as his pupil, I begged to see his scriptures.

He said:

‘The essential Way is but a single foot of silk, enough to cross the world.

It needs not be many volumes.

Yet broad study is better than ignorance, for it gives understanding of intention and shallow methods for beginners to avoid danger.’

He first showed me about a hundred volumes of Daoist admonitions and non-essential writings.

I had already seen many such works elsewhere, so I questioned him on doubtful passages.

He said:

‘You have discernment, I can teach you.

Yet your knowledge is wide but not deep, your mind scattered among outer learning.

You have not yet plumbed the depths of the Scriptures.

Now I shall show you finer books.’

He promised that his collected writings, short texts written on silk and paper gathered over many years would reach some two hundred volumes, but in the end they could never be fully obtained.

The other disciples all served in labor, gathering firewood or tilling the fields.

I, being weak and frail, could not, so I repaid by cleaning his chamber, wiping tables, grinding ink, holding lamps, and copying his old manuscripts.

He treated me as among the advanced disciples, saying:

‘Among these Daoist texts, every scroll has fine teachings.

Examine them for quality and choose what to practice.

Do not try to memorize all, for that wastes time and tires the mind.

Once the Golden Elixir is complete, all these others are needless.

Yet for students, the order of depth and progression must be shown, that none stray in confusion.’

He would not let others copy his books freely.

Each must first grasp the meaning.

Though one might borrow them long, none dared steal even a single character.

Master Zheng had been a great Confucian before turning to the Dao.

He still taught Rites and Documents, and his virtue and demeanor were lofty and upright.

When one came to question him, all approached with reverence.

The books I borrowed, if held for a month, I might have copied much, yet I dared not, for his insight was keen.

If he caught my deceit, I would lose his favor.

Thus, though I drank of the river, I never filled my belly.

Among his fifty-odd disciples, only I was permitted to see the Golden Elixir Scripture and the Three Sovereigns Inner Text and Five-Phases Record under the Pillow.

The others never saw even the title page.

Of the rest, I obtained only their names.

Now, for your sake, I shall list them, that later seekers may search them widely."

3.The Catalog of Daoist Scriptures

The Daoist Canon contains:

The Inner Text of the Three Sovereigns — Heaven, Earth, and Man (三皇内文：天、地、人三篇)

The Original Text, Upper, Middle, Lower (元文上下中三篇)

Classic of Complete Formation (成形經)

Record of Mystery (玄錄)

Nine Lives Classic (九生經)

Twenty-Four Lives Classic (二十四生經)

Nine Immortals Classic (九仙經)

Immortal Divination Classic (仙卜經)

Twelve Transformations Classic (十二化經)

Nine Changes Classic (九變經)

Laojun's Jade Calendar True Classic (老君玉曆真經)

Mozi's Pillow Book of the Five Phases (墨子五行枕中書)

Treasure of Warmth Classic (温寶經)

Pacifying the People Classic (安民經)

Naturalness Classic (自然經)

Yin-Yang Classic (陰陽經)

Book of Nourishing Life (養生書一百五卷)

Classic of Great Peace (太平經五十卷)

Nine Reverences Classic (九敬經)

Jia-Yi Classic (嘉義經一百七十卷)

Azure Dragon Classic (青龍經)

Central Yellow Classic (中央黃經)

Supreme Clarity Classic (太清經)

Universal Brightness Classic (太明經)

Massage Classic (按摩經)

Guiding and Pulling Classic (導引經十卷)

Yuanyangzi Classic (元陽子經)

Xuan-nü and Su-nü Classics (玄女經、素女經)

Pengzu Classic (彭祖經)

Chen She Classic (陳涉經)

Zi-du Classic (紫都經)

Zhang Xu Classic (張旭經)

Tianmenzi Classic (天門子經)

Rongcheng Classic (容成經)

Entering Mountains Classic (入山經)

Inner Treasures Classic (内寶經)

Four Regulations Classic (四條經)

Bright Mirror Classic (明鏡經)

Sun and Moon Mirror Classic (日月鏡經)

Five Words Classic (五言經)

Pillar Classic (柱經)

Spiritual Treasure Prince's Heart Scripture (靈寶太子心經)

Dragon-Leap Classic (龍躍經)

True Mechanism Classic (真機經)

Balance Classic (衡經)

Flying Tortoise Classic (飛龜經)

Deer-Hoof Classic (鹿蹄經)

Record of Walking upon Form (履形錄)

Diagram of Guarding the Form (守形圖)

Diagram of Sitting Forgetfulness (坐忘圖)

Chart of Reclining Meditation (臥禪圖)

Chart of Containing Light (含光圖)

Chart of Watching Heaven (觀天圖)

Diagrams of the Five Mushrooms, Wood, Fungal, Flesh, Stone, and Mixed (五芝圖：木芝、菌芝、肉芝、石芝、雜芝)

Five Peaks Classic (五岳經五卷)

Records of Hidden Guarding (隱守錄)

Eastern Well Diagram (東井圖)

Empty Origin Classic (空元經)

Cowherd Classic (牽牛經)

Wang Mi Record (王彌錄)

La Completion Record (剌成錄 / 羅成錄 depending on recension)

Six Calms Record (六寂錄)

Crane's Cry Record (鶴鳴錄)

Pingdu Record (平都錄)

Fixing the Heart Record (定心錄)

Turtle Patterns Classic (龜文經)

Shanyang Record (山陽錄)

Jade Contract Record (玉約錄)

Eight Histories Chart (八史圖)

Entering the Chamber Classic (入室經)

Left-Right Contracts (左右約)

Jade Calendar Classic (玉曆經)

Rites of Ascension (登真禮)

Nine Marvels Classic (九奇經)

Rebirth Classic (再生經)

Four Collars Classic (四領經十卷)

Eating the Essence of Sun and Moon (食日月精)

Ingesting the Six Breaths (服六氣)

Classic of the One Elixir (一丹經)

Fetal Breathing Classic (胎息經)

Regulating Breath to Heal Classic (調氣愈疾經)

Victory Within Classic (内勝經十卷)

Hundred Guarding Classic (百守經)

Elixir Vessel Classic (丹器經)

Minshan Classic (岷山經)

Inner Classic of Wei Boyang (魏伯陽内經)

Sun and Moon Kitchen Classic (日月廚經)

Walking the Three Celestial Paths and Six Calendars Classic (步三天六甲經)

Entering Armies Classic (入軍經)

Six Yin Jade Maiden Classic (六陰玉女經)

Four Lords' Essentials Classic (四公要經)

Golden Goose Classic (金鵠經)

Thirty-Six Waters Classic (三十六水經)

White Tiger Seven Transformations Classic (白虎七化經)

Earth-Walking Immortal Classic (步地仙經)

Gold-Alchemy Essentials Classic (金丹要經)

Eight Sages Alchemy Classic (八聖丹經)

Celestial Master's Divine Implements Classic (天師神器經)

Pillow Book of Alchemy (丹枕書五卷)

Bai Zi Transformations Classic (白子化經)

Disaster-Averting Classic (禳災經)

Calamity-Repelling Classic (卻禍經)

Central Yellow Classic (中央黃經)

Scripture of Scholars (儒經)

Juanzi Heaven-Earth-Man Classic (卷子天地人經)

Cui Wenzi Elbow Book (崔文子肘後書)

Shining Spirit's Divination Classic (明神卜經)

Water Immortal Classic (水仙經)

Corpse Liberation Classic (尸解經)

Central Escape Classic (中央遁經)

Li Jun's Enclosing Heaven Classic (李君包天經)

Enclosing Origin Classic (包元經)

Yellow Court Classic (黃庭經)

Abyssal Body Classic (淵身經)

Supreme Element Classic (太素經)

Canopy Classic (蓋經)

Moving Kitchen Classic (移廚經)

Subtle Words (微言三卷)

Inner Vision Classic (内觀經)

Master Wenshi Classic (文始先生經)

Extending Life through Calendars Classic (延年曆經)

Southern Expanse Record (南荒錄)

Union Dragon Record (合龍錄七卷)

Nine Palaces (九宮五卷)

Three-Five Central Classic (三五中經)

Perpetual Constancy Classic (常道經)

Unbinding Classic (解結經)

Zou Yangzi Classic (鄒陽子經)

Ten Scrolls of Dark Cavern Classic (玄穴十卷)

Ten Scrolls of Manifest Mystery (顯玄十卷)

Ten Scrolls of Mount Ji (箕山十卷)

Deer Terrace Classic (鹿臺經)

Lesser Youth Classic (小童經)

Inner Record of the River and Luo (河洛内記七卷)

Realization of Form Classic (得形經五卷)

Mechanism of the Dao Classic (道機經五卷)

Record of Seeing Spirits (見神錄)

Limitless Classic (無極經)

Master Gong's Classic (公子經)

Perfected Jade Embryo Classic (真人玉胎經)

Root of the Dao Classic (道本經)

Chart of Appointed Destiny (命定圖)

Reversing the Fetal Womb Classic (反胎經)

Pillow Record of Purity (清枕錄)

Illusion and Transformation Classic (幻化經)

Questioning Transformation Classic (問化經)

Mount Golden Flower Classic (金華山經)

Phoenix Net Classic (鳳網經)

Summoning Destiny Classic (召命經)

Guarding Spirits Record (守神錄)

Guigu Classic (鬼谷經)

Lingxiaozi's Pacifying Spirit Record (靈霄子安神錄)

Yellow Mountain Master Record (黃山子錄)

Wangzi's Five Phases True Classic (王子五行真經)

Lesser Elixirs Classic (小丹經)

Grand Treasures Classic (大寶經)

Zou Sheng's Longevity Classic (鄒生延年經)

Pacifying the Soul Record (安魂錄)

Imperial Dao Classic (帝道經)

Nine Yin Classic (九陰經)

Collected Records (雜錄)

Silver Casket and Jade Coffer Records (銀函玉篋錄)

Golden Tablets Classic (金簡經)

Record of the Immortals of Huang-Lao (黃老真人錄)

Primal Capital Classic (元都經)

Mystic Origin Classic (玄元經)

Solar Essence Classic (日精經)

Complete Formation Classic (成形經)

Collection on the Three Corpses (三尸集)

Calling the Body Spirit and Healing Hundred Diseases Classic (召身神治百病經)

Subduing Mountain Demons and Evil Spirits (三卷) (鎮山鬼邪經三卷)

Record of Entering the Five Poisons (三卷) (入五毒錄三卷)

Fasting from Grain (三卷) (絶穀經三卷)

Gathering Divine Herbs and Secret Methods (三卷) (採神草秘法三卷)

Commanding Earth Spirits when Ascending Mountains and Crossing Seas (三卷) (登山渡海役地神三卷)

Zhao Taibai's Five Essentials (五卷) (趙太白五要五卷)

Great Prohibitions against Epidemics and Plagues (七卷) (大禁疫癘七卷)

Summoning and Controlling the Gods of the Five Peaks and Mount Tai (三卷) (召制五岳泰山諸神三卷)

Methods for Managing Palaces and Residences (五卷) (治宮室法五卷)

Prohibitions against Tigers and Wolves (record) (禁虎狼錄)

Summoning Insects and Serpents of a Hundred Miles (record) (召百里蟲蛇錄)

Ten Thousand Arts of Master Gaoqiu (三卷) (高丘子萬術三卷)

Wang Qiao's Treatise on Nourishing Life (三卷) (王喬養生論三卷)

Prohibitions and Taboos in Taking Medicines (服藥禁忌)

Account of Establishing Merit and Increasing Life Span (立功延壽記)

Daoist Laws of Stealing Life (三卷) (道偷生律三卷)

Moving Gate Record (移門錄)

Ghost Soldiers Manual (鬼兵書)

Art of Raising the Dead (起死術)

Training the Form (五卷) (練形五卷)

Master Xi's Essentials of the Dao (奚師道要)

Master Jiao's Longevity Collection (焦師延年集)

Lesser Lord's Intent of the Dao (十卷) (小君道意十卷)

Fan Ying's Stone Inscription (三卷) (范嬰石銘三卷)

Thinking Spirit Classic (三卷) (思神經三卷)

Dragon's Head Classic (龍首經)

Mount Jing Record (荊山錄)

Kong Anxian's Abyss and Red Axe Record (七卷) (孔安仙淵赤斧錄七卷)

Dong Jun's Earth Immortal Anti-Aging Essentials (董君地仙却老要)

Li Master's Oral Formulas (二卷) (李師口訣二卷)

4. The Books of Talismans

Beyond the scriptures, there are also many talismanic books -

Self-Arising Talismans (自然符)

Golden Light Talismans (金光符)

Supreme Mystery Talismans (太玄符, 3 scrolls)

Heaven-Penetrating Talismans (通天符)

Five-Essence Talismans (五精符)

Stone-Chamber Talismans (石室符)

Jade Contract Talismans (玉約符)

Pillow Talismans (枕中符)

Lesser Youth Talismans (小童符)

Nine-Spirit Talismans (九靈符)

Six-Lord Talismans (六君符)

Mysterious Capital Talismans (玄都符)

Yellow Emperor Talismans (黃帝符)

Thirty-Six General Talismans of Shaoqian (少乾三十六將符)

Life-Extending Divine Talismans (延命神符)

Heavenly Water Talismans (天水符)

Forty-Nine True Talismans (四十九真符)

Azure Dragon Talismans (青龍符)

White Tiger Talismans (白虎符)

Vermilion Bird Talismans (朱雀符)

Dark Warrior Talismans (玄武符)

Seven-Mechanism Talismans (七機符)

Nine-Heaven Military Talismans (九天兵符)

Ancient Scripture Talismans (古經符)

Great Deliverance Talismans (大解符)

Eight-Trigram Talismans (八卦符)

Thunder and Lightning Talismans (雷電符)

Great Joy Talismans (大喜符)

Talisman of the Yin-Yang Great Seal (陰陽大印符)

Healing Hundred Diseases (治百病符, 10 scrolls)

Exorcising Monsters (却怪符, 10 scrolls)

Pot-Master Talismans (壺公符, 20 scrolls)

Nine-Platform Talismans (九臺符, 9 scrolls)

Six-Jia Spirit-Communion Talismans (六甲通靈符, 10 scrolls)

Six-Yin Dragon Womb Talismans (六陰龍胎符)

Together five hundred scrolls.

Bao Puzi said:

“Master Zheng said: all talismans originate from the Lord Lao (Laojun), and are celestial texts.

He who attains communion with the spirits receives them directly.

Today they are often ineffectual because ages have passed and transcription errors abound.

Also, faith is weak and practice careless.

Like writing, an error in stroke changes meaning.

Write ‘fish’ thrice, and it becomes ‘Lu’. ‘void’ thrice, and it becomes ‘tiger’.

Many talisman characters are now illegible, errors unnoticed, so their power is uncertain.

Yet some few have the natural ‘body-use’, their talismans always work, like those who naturally exude fragrance from musk.

Still, if one obtains a correct talisman and uses it with pure intent, even without the true ‘body-use’ the results are swift and beneficial.

For Daoists who seek immortality, their heart must be in the elixirs.

Talismans and swords serve only to repel demons and evil.

The great talismans that claim to bring immortality cannot alone be relied upon.

In the Wu kingdom there was once a man named Jie Xiang, who could read talismanic script and discern errors.

When shown anonymous talismans for curing diseases and exorcising ghosts, he named each correctly and fixed the errors.

Since his time, none have equaled his understanding."

Editors note – "Body use" refers to your own innate spiritual/magic power. Essentially a talisman is just a written magical spell. Similar to how you can write anything on paper but if one cannot read it then it's just paper with scribbles.

5. On the Most Sacred Scriptures

Someone asked:

"Of the immortal arts, none surpass the Golden Elixir.

I have heard this.

Yet among talismanic books, which are the most divine?"

Bao Puzi replied:

"I heard Master Zheng say:

Of all Daoist writings, none are weightier than the Three Sovereigns Inner Text and the True Form Diagrams of the Five Peaks.

The immortals and perfected beings of old revered and concealed them,

transmitting them only to those already titled as immortals, once in forty years, sealed by blood-oath and sworn covenant.

Each of the Five Sacred Mountains preserves a copy, hidden within stone chambers in secret recesses.

When one destined for the Way enters the mountain with utmost sincerity, the mountain god opens the cave for him to see it.

Thus Bo Zhongli found it in the mountains, he set up an altar, offered silk, copied one book, and departed.

Those who possess it must keep it in a clean and pure place, honoring it as they would ruler or father.

The scripture says:

“A household with the Three Sovereigns Text repels evil ghosts, plague, and misfortune.

If a sick person is near death, but his faith in the Dao is sincere, give him this book to hold, and he will not die.

If a woman labors and cannot give birth, give her this, the child will come forth.

A Daoist who seeks longevity, carrying this into mountains, is untouched by tigers, wolves, poisons, or demons.

He may cross rivers unharmed, still storms and waves, transform and rise.

For building houses or tombs - write dozens of ‘Earth-Sovereign’ texts, spread them upon the ground, and next day see where yellow marks appear, there build, and fortune follows.

If another is burying a corpse, secretly place within the tomb a ‘Man-Sovereign’ text with your name upon it, you will have no thieves or disasters, and your enemies’ plots will turn upon themselves.

Before using it, fast a hundred days in purity.

Then you may summon the Celestial Lords of Fate, the Year Spirit, and all gods of mountains, rivers, and altars, who will appear in human form and answer your questions of fortune, misfortune, safety, and calamity.

There are also eighteen sacred words to wear within your clothing. Cross seas and no storm will arise.

A household possessing the Five Peaks True Form Diagram repels armies and treachery.

Those who seek to harm you will suffer their own doom.

But if the possessor lacks benevolence, righteousness, and sincerity, the spirit of the text will turn upon him, bringing ruin to his house.

It must never be handled lightly.”

6. On the Arts of Transformation

The greatest of the arts of transformation is the Mozi Five Phases Record, originally five scrolls.

Before ascending, Master Liu Jun'an abridged it into one.

Its methods employ both elixirs and talismans, enabling one to fly through the air, vanish at will, smile and become a woman, frown and become an old man, crouch to become a child, or strike the ground and turn into trees.

By planting things, fruits appear, to eat.

Drawing a river on the ground, real water flows.

Piling earth, a mountain rises.

Sitting, a kitchen of food arrives.

Summoning clouds, calling fire, nothing cannot be done.

Next comes the Hidden Subtleties of the Jade Maiden (one scroll), whereby one may transform into birds and beasts, gold and jade, raise clouds and rain across a hundred li, or cause snow likewise.

One may cross great waters without boat or bridge, divide into a thousand bodies, ride the winds and fly high, exhale seven-colored vapors, see the eight extremes and all beneath the earth, and radiate light for ten thousand zhang, illuminating darkness.

Yet one must walk among dozens of stars, the steps are intricate and hard to memorize.

Few can master its measures.

The Huainan Hongbao and Wanbi arts are far beneath it.

There is also the White Tiger Seven Transformations Formula.

On the third day of the third month, take the hide of a slain white tiger, its living blood, and purple ribbon, mix with duckweed, plant it that day.

The sprout resembles sesame; it bears seed.

Each time the seed is planted, its nature alters; after seven plantings, combine the seeds.

One may change form, fly, or dive at will.

These are akin to the Mozi and Jade Maiden methods.

Beyond these, there is nothing greater."

7. Conclusion

"Remote Survey" was written so that lovers of the Dao might know the names of the rare books.

Master Zheng was not only versed in the Five Classics and the Dao of the Immortals, but also mastered the Nine Palaces, Three Marvels, astronomy, and the prophecies of the River and Luo.

In the first year of Tai'an, foreseeing the chaos of the age.

When the south of the Yangtze would soon boil in war.

He carried his satchel of immortal elixirs and, taking his disciples, went eastward to Mount Huo.

Thereafter, none knew where he went.”

Chapter 20 - Dispelling Delusion (祛惑)

1. On Choosing the True Master

Bao Puzi said:

“To seek luminous pearls, one must dive into the depths of Hepu Bay. Only there may the dragon’s night-glow be found.

To gather fine jade, one must climb the ridges of Mount Jing. Only there may the flawless inch-disk of worth be gained.

To inquire of the Dao, if one does not find the right teacher, then to abandon him too quickly hoping for gain is vain.

To cling to him too long without fruit is waste.

Time passes, regret arrives, and nothing can be undone.

Even shallow worldly crafts cannot be known by sitting idly, how much less the mystery of immortality!

Though one be sagely and clear-minded, none can self-awaken to it. It cannot be reached by thought alone, nor by analogy.

One truly needs a teacher and such a teacher must be deep and vast, as dipping water from a boundless sea, or cutting timber in a forest without end.

The peril lies not in scarcity of materials, but in weakness of strength.

What the tiger or leopard leaves behind, the fox or rat will quarrel over.

What Tao Zhu Gong throws away, Yan Yuan cannot obtain.

If the one you study with has never approached the profound gates of the Abyssal Pond, but is a narrow and ignorant man, his knowledge shallow, its source short and stream swift.

When he teaches, he clings greedily to what he has.

When he shares, his portion is thin and unremarkable.

What he treasures is already impure.

If he further divides it among disciples, what can come of it?

It is as if begging for grain at the gate of Bo Yi and Shu Qi, or seeking warmth in the home of Qian Lou.

You'll receive only acorns and rough cloth, never fine food or silks.

Some cling to dull masters all their lives without awakening.

Some by fortune meet a true one but fail to seek diligently.

Both are losses beyond recall.

To discern depth in men is not easy.

White stone resembles jade, the cunning resembles the wise.

The virtuous hide themselves so that having they seem not to have.

The deceivers boast so that emptiness appears full.

Without true brilliance, how can one tell them apart?

Those who cling to mediocre teachers do not know they are ignorant. They merely think they have enough.

Those who meet the accomplished but do not serve them think there is no difference.

He who truly knows the Essential Way is without worldly desire,

unmoved by praise or fame, why would he show himself to the vulgar crowd?

Yet the shallow boast and pretend, using fierce faces and loud voices to paint their hollowness, dazzling the late-learned and uttering grand claims.

“I have ascended sacred mountains, I have met immortals.”

Those who hear them suddenly and fail to examine closely rarely see their falsehood.

In the past I often saw wandering Taoists haunting noble gates, commanding their servants to spread rumors of their age.

‘He is four or five hundred years old!’

When asked his years, he pretends not to hear, smiles, bows, and murmurs ‘eighty or ninety.’.

Soon after he boasts:

‘I once dwelt on Mount Huayin and abstained from grain fifty years.

Then on Mount Song forty years.

Then on Mount Tai sixty years and on Mount Ji fifty more.’

When his listeners count it up, he has lived several hundred years.

Then the rich and credulous flock to him like mist and smoke.”

2. False Seers and Minor Magicians

“Some magicians have a natural ‘sensitivity of body’ and can see spirits or divine forms, even foretell events past and future, yet they cannot bring blessing or avert harm, no more than tortoise shells or yarrow stalks can.

People see small accuracies and call them ‘divine’, believing they know all things.

Others excel in talismans, water, or incantations to expel evil, effective perhaps, but ignorant of the Way of Immortality.

Some see ghosts through mixed practices yet gain no life extension.

Ask them of the Golden Elixir and they are blank.

Most deceive the world for profit, doing all things unworthy.

Thieves on another road.

Empty words cannot match deeds with proof.

I record these examples so later students may see through such false arts.”

3. The Old Strong Man

“Once there was an ancient called the Old Strong Man.

He took herbal formulas and practiced the methods of Rong Cheng and Xuan Su.

At eighty he was still hale and clear-minded.

People hailed him as an immortal or a man of a thousand years.

The Inspector of Yangzhou heard and summoned him to Yidu.

He came stammering and shrinking, as if his knowledge was vast but half unsaid.

Curious folk crowded like mist and clouds, offering gifts and money; he was honored like Luan or Li of Han.

He always took asparagus root (Tian Men Dong) and nothing else, proving he lacked the Great Elixir.

He knew some ancient stories from books and claimed to be four thousand years old, boasting he had seen Yao, Shun, Yu, and Tang.

He described their faces and deeds in detail, mixing truth and falsehood:

‘Yao’s eyebrows had eight rays, not so! They only stood upright like the character 八.’

‘He was tall and bearded, drank two hu of wine a day, later men exaggerated it to a thousand jars.’

‘Though a sage, he was old and less vigorous than in youth.

When he banished the Four Evildoers and raised Yuan Kai, it was thanks to Shun’s aid.’

He praised Shun as a poor youth of great talent who farmed, fished, and potted clay until recognized for his virtue.

He even claimed to have foretold his rise.

He told tales of Confucius’ birth, height, and features, and claimed to have advised him to study the Yi Jing.

He spoke of meeting Qin Shi Huang and warning him about the Divine Tripod of Zhou.

His stories overflowed, each listener believed.

Later he grew senile and forgotful.

The Inspector once gave him a jade goblet; he later claimed it was a gift from Anqi Sheng in antiquity.

He died at Huang Zheng's house in Shouchun. They suspected he had 'ascended'.

A year later they opened the coffin — his corpse was still there.

Such named-but-not-real men cause the world to disbelieve that true immortals exist."

4. The Tale of Cai Dan

"Governor Wu Wen of Chengdu told of a man Cai Dan in Wuyuan who sought the Dao but found no good teacher.

He abandoned his family and spent his days reciting the Yellow Court, Supreme Clarity, and Observing Heaven Section, non-essential texts, ceaselessly, believing the Way complete in chanting alone.

After years, nothing changed. His family grew weary.

Ashamed and angry, he fled to the mountains, claiming to have become an immortal.

Yet he knew not how to gather herbs to avoid hunger and lived by selling firewood for three years, starving and cold.

He returned home, blackened and emaciated.

Asked if he had ascended, he said:

‘I am not a Heavenly Immortal yet, only an Earth Immortal. At first I served Lao Jun as keeper of his dragons.

One five-colored dragon escaped, and I was punished to weed three or four acres beneath Kunlun for ten years.

Luckily Wang Qiao and Huo Quan interceded, so I was released, but I must work again before rising.’

He described Kunlun in detail, its sky only ten zhang above, trees of jade and crystal, whose branches rang like five tones when the wind blew, mountain gates four li wide, cities of five walls and twelve towers, giant serpents and beasts, divine officers, and rivers of weak water no bird could cross.

Many believed him, for his speech was vivid and detailed.”

5. The Expelled Immortal and Other Frauds

“In Pufan of Hedong there was a man Xiang Dudu, who went with his son to learn immortality in the mountains.

After ten years he returned. Asked why, he said:

‘After three years of purity an immortal came and carried me on a dragon to Heaven.

Passing the Purple Palace, I was given a cup of flowing rosy mist and knew no hunger or thirst.

But I longed for home, and in audience with the Emperor of Heaven I erred in ritual, so I was sent back to cultivate again.’

Hence people called him ‘the Expelled Immortal’.

Such types abound, who could list them all?

Their false stories are so brazen that even the clear-eyed may be deceived.

Others pretend to be famous Taoists of old, like one who called himself Bai He, claiming to be 8,700 years old.

In Luoyang there was a real Daoist named Bai He, erudite in many arts.

Another man in Hebei later claimed to be him; people rushed to serve him with gifts.

When Bai He's disciples came joyfully to see their 'master returned', they found he was false, and he fled.

Thus the world is filled with such imitators."

6. Final Admonition

"The Five Classics and the Four Divisions are already like straw dogs offered and discarded, the dregs of the past.

What are called 'traces' are the prints of feet, not the feet themselves.

What are called ‘books’ are things written by sages, but not sages themselves, yet the scholars carry their satchels ten thousand li to seek teachers of them.

How much more, then, must one labor and inquire into the Way of Long Life, which the Perfected Ones hold most dear!

Yet one must distinguish truth from falsehood carefully.

I fear that frauds like the Old Strong Man, Cai Dan, Xiang Dudu, and Bai He will never cease from the world.

Let those who love the Way read this chapter of mine and refine their discernment, separating the true from the false.

The Immortal Scriptures say: “The eyes of immortals are square in their pupils.”

In Luoyang I met one named Bai Zhongli. He told me his pupils were indeed perfectly square, surely he was a true transcendent being.”

Outer chapters (外篇)

Chapter 1 - The Praiseworthy Withdrawal (嘉遁)

1.

Bao Puzi said:

There was one called Master Cherishing Ice. He grew weary of the wandering and uncertainty of the world, and pitied those who struggled for what could not be kept.

He gave up fertile lands and rich soil, and went to till the barren and salty plains.

He sealed within his bag the Six Marvels, and held precious gems in silence without revealing them.

His clear tone was never heard, his brilliance and refinement were hidden from the world.

He turned his back on the splendor of the red gates, and kept peace and quiet in a humble hut.

He walked no more in the alleys of the rich and powerful, but nourished his vast spirit among hermits and simple folk.

He regarded rank and honor as misfortune, and jade and silk as nothing more than earth and grass.

He lifted his spirit to the clouds above, and chose to turn away from the present and follow the ancients.

He sheltered himself beneath lofty peaks, and rested upon fragrant mats of green orchids.

He rinsed his mouth with the clear waters of rosy clouds, and fed upon the refined essence of the Eight Stones.

His thoughts were subtle and far-reaching, as if dwelling at the edge of the rainbow. His mind was light and drifting, as though beside the realm of mirrored sunlight.

The ten thousand things could not disturb his harmony, and the four seas could not trouble his spirit.

2.

At that time there was a nobleman named Lord Pursuing Advantage who heard of him. Moved with admiration, he sighed and said:

“In an empty valley, if a fine steed raises its proud neck, it is a shame to Sun Yang who knew how to recognize horses. In times of peace, if the world loses such a man of talent, then the duty of true discernment is unfulfilled.

How can we allow a man of excellence to keep his virtue hidden, while the enlightened age is left without the service of the worthy?”

3.

Then the nobleman came and spoke to him, saying:

“I have heard of those who spread their wings yet never soar through the nine heavens. They rise and fall within the dark mysteries but never set in order the principles of humanity. Such cannot be called the truly great.

Now you, Master, possess the sharp edge of decisive action and the brilliance of elegant expression. You study the records of sages in the wild marsh where tracks are lost, and your ornate words gather among birds and beasts. You display the dragon’s pattern in the darkest night, polish the jewels of wisdom in the deepest pools. You hide your radiance in high summer, conceal your beauty even when spring blooms.

When you speak with joy, the wood bends and smiles as if sharing in laughter. When you speak with grief, your brow furrows and tears flow. When you press lightly, feathers sink upon weak water; when you lift weight, jade and stone drift upon surging waves. When divided, liver and gall seem far as Hu and Yue; when united, the myriad distinctions blend into harmony. Your strict words chill like autumn frost, your gentle words bloom like spring ice. You bring down the high and raise the low, clear the dark and cleanse the turbid, refine the yellow river into clarity itself.

Yet you do not spread great benefit to the people, nor inscribe vast merit for the royal house. Your name will fade like morning dew, your body perish like the mayfly. The treasures of sages will be forgotten, and the song of your life will pass away. I lament that you do not take your place among them.”

4.

He continued:

“I have heard that the greatest order is between Heaven and Earth, and next comes that between ruler and minister. The sages of old grieved for their times and sought to put the Way into practice. When the realm was without a ruler for three months, they grew anxious and restless.

If our present sovereign is not yet equal to Yao and Shun, and the common people cannot yet be sheltered in peace, how can men of virtue stand aside? Some raised tripods and dragons leapt, others struck their horns and sang like phoenixes. They did not wait for carriages of state before acting, nor for a new King Wen before they rose. They advanced and withdrew according to the time, finding benefit in motion and peace in rest.

Those who turned branches to the orchid wind and cleansed defilement in pure waves were like reflections responding to the mirror’s light, like circles and squares matching the compass and rule. Thus merit and virtue reached above and below, grace spread to the eight quarters.

Yao was great because he gathered the wise, Shun was revered because he humbled himself. The Duke of Zhou divided the realm in three, King Wu overthrew tyranny. Huan and Wen restored unity, and Gaozu of Han answered Heaven’s call. None achieved greatness without gathering heroes as wings and wise men as their oars.

If each man were to cling only to his purity, each farmer only to his plow, then the transforming power of the ancients would never have arisen, the brilliance of the enlightened would never have been seen, and the songs of wise rulers would never have been sung. The great net of Heaven’s order would never have been spread.”

5.

He said again:

“Those who store their talent are precious only when they can adapt to change and meet the time. Those who rise above the crowd are honored when they can bring forth brilliance and restore order.

If the sun hides its light behind clouds, the brightness of Heaven is not revealed. If the tiger sheaths its claws and teeth, its power in the hunt is not known. If the sword of Tai’a keeps its edge hidden, its sharpness is unseen. If the fine steed is held and not released, its swiftness in chasing the wind cannot appear.

When all remain silent, Zigong and the mute share the same mouth. When all are blind, Li Zhu and the sightless are no different.

You keep your body pure but neglect the disorder of the world. You find delight in your own mind yet forget the duty to help the higher order. You live with a hidden heart, and die without the sound of metal or stone. Even ordinary men would feel anger at this. How could a man of true refinement be without concern?”

6.

He said:

“When the line is straight, the wood is shaped true. When uprightness prevails, corruption withers. When Yao and Shun governed, the four evildoers were punished. When Confucius held office, the lawless were driven out.

As thunder shakes the drums into silence, as the rising sun makes lamps go dim, so when virtue shines, wickedness fades away.

If no one heals the sickness of lost souls, how can we equal the skill of the healer of Yue? If no one strengthens the world in troubled times, how will we know the greatness of rare minds?

To stand by idly while men drown is not compassion. To cling to one's own purity while the state is lost is not the work of the wise.

If one waits for the mulberry trees to bloom in winter, or for phoenixes to sing each morning, if one expects the unicorn to stand in every field and twin trees to grow in every forest, then the banners will never be raised, the drums will never sound.

When the age of peace finally comes and heroes step back, who will then bring forth the worthies from obscurity? I sincerely wish, Master, that you will not stray too far and lose the Way."

7.

Then Master Cherishing Ice gazed into the distance, his spirit wandering through the heavens. His mind stretched far away, as if nothing existed around him. At last he looked down and replied:

"Ah, such words indeed.

The perfected man acts without action, resting his spirit in stillness and emptiness. He does not burden his will with desire for rank or reward; therefore harm and disgrace cannot reach him. He does not stand upon perilous paths; therefore no fall can threaten him.

Even when his meals are coarse herbs and beans, his heart roams freely in halls of light. Though he lives among the common people, his joy equals that of those who rule the land.

He lies in a humble lodging, closes the door of dry wood, walks with rustic friends of Zhuang and Lai, and tends his poor dwelling. He stands firm as a mountain peak, unshaken by gain or loss.

When desire grows wide, harmony becomes turbid; therefore he casts away worldly affairs and does not turn his gaze toward them. When high position brings deep worry, he leaves behind power and wealth without regret.

He values not rank for its title, nor wealth for its treasure. He soars like the great bird Peng, unentangled by the smell of decayed rats. He takes Bo Yi and Shu Qi as stern warnings, and will not trade the joy of a simple meal for fame and riches."

8.

"Moreover, the black and yellow of Heaven and Earth are vast and far, while human life passes in a blink.

We dwell in this brief gap of light and shadow, rushing like a shooting star, flashing like an arrow through the air.

Better to wander at ease and find joy in oneself. Why should I torment my body for things outside me?

The phoenix does not fall into nets, the unicorn does not stumble into traps. Even birds and beasts know how to avoid harm — shall men of the dust be less wise?"

9.

“As for those who destroy their homes to win glory, who throw themselves into fire to deceive the enemy, who cut their throats to prove brotherhood, who die in sacrifice for loyalty, such as Yao Li, Ji Xin, Chen Jia, Zhong You, Ying Men, Nie Zheng, Jing Ke, and Fan Gong, all were moved by foolish passion.

They are the madness of the lower mind, not the path of higher wisdom.”

10.

He said:

“Those whose salaries are heavy bear heavy burdens. Those whose rank is high suffer labor of the spirit.

Thus the recluse of the Lacquer Garden cast his line and cared nothing for the glory of high ministers. The farmer of Bocheng held his plow and disdained the nobility of lords.

Yang Zhu would not pluck even a single hair for the world. Yan Hui found joy in poverty and peace in his thatched hut.

But those who chase after fortune are blind to what is truly desirable. They flock like birds to every tree, seek office in every age, crave advancement yet never foresee the disasters that follow.

They take up duties they cannot bear, and meet ruin they cannot endure.

When they speak of honor, they quote Yi Yin and Duke Zhou. When they speak of regret, they hide their failures and do not recall them.

They wait for the river dragon to sleep so they may steal its pearl. They stand in royal favor yet hope for safety.

They rest in temporary comfort yet forget the danger to come. They seek the glory of a fungus that lives but a day, and long for the lifespan of the great tree that endures a thousand years.

They walk upon thin ice waiting for summer heat, climb dead branches hoping for a strong wind. The fish of the deep bite fragrant bait, the pheasant of the marsh swallows poisoned grain.

They chew rotten meat to fill hunger, they drink deadly wine to quench thirst."

11.

"In olden times, Ji Zi wept when he saw ivory chopsticks, and Confucius sighed deeply when he heard of paired burials.

From the smallest sign, they knew what was to come. By tracing the beginning, they foresaw the end.

But the dull tread into peril without seeing it. How hard it is to foresee danger, and how deeply rooted is the desire for gain.

King Cheng of Zhou was wise, yet believed slander. The Duke of Zhou was sage, yet fled south to Chu.

He wrote his lament to the owls, and only the hidden words on the metal scroll saved him.

If even such rulers may be deceived, how can others claim safety?

A wise lord may appear once in an age, but slander never ceases for a day.

Virtue does not grow from violent storms, nor does worth arise from flaunting gems and jade.

Tears and regret will come too late, as always they have."

12.

"When something is soaked for long, even lacquer will lose its strength. When something is drenched too deeply, even bone and flesh fall apart.

When dust and feathers pile up, the boat will sink and its axle break. When rumors are told three times, even a false tiger in the market becomes true.

Jiang Chong was low-born, yet not kin to the heir. The stepmother was a usurper, yet not close to Bo Qi.

Through slander and deceit they destroyed the bond of father and son. Through hidden lies of bees they shattered the love of nature itself.

How much more, then, may other bonds be broken. Who can be certain of safety?

Alas, Wu Yuan held loyalty and his body drifted in the river.

Truly sad, Bai Qi kept righteousness and cut his own throat.

To see such things chills the heart. Even the skilled craftsman may be dazzled and lose his measure."

13.

"Some wish to strike down others by finding fault with small talent, and defend their own pride by criticizing the crowd.

But do they not see that though metal conquers wood, the drill cannot fell a forest? Though water overcomes fire, a single cup cannot extinguish a burning mountain?

An inch of glue cannot cleanse the Yellow River. A foot of water cannot cool the heat of Mount Xiao.

Therefore those who keep both body and name intact are few, while those who laugh first and weep later are many.

They fear disgrace yet cannot abandon desire for glory. They hate insult yet cannot stop their passion to compete.

They are like men who hate the wet yet dive into deep waters. Like those who loathe their shadow yet run from shade.

They patch holes in a leaking boat and rest while it still floods. They stir a raging fire and hope thereby to calm the boil.”

14.

“The body of seven chi was given by birth, it must not be returned maimed. The heart within one square inch is governed by ourselves, it must not be lost to wandering or indulgence.

Plow the soil to eat, dig a well to drink. Wear rough cloth to cover yourself, thatch a hut to shelter your rest. Sing to amuse the heart, breathe to preserve the breath.

Wander among bamboo and plain paper, express yourself through the ink of the Way. Guard constancy and await your end — that is enough.

When the Way abides within, one is noble. When virtue prevails, one is rich. The man of wisdom would not use a pearl to strike a sparrow. Why must one wait for power to be revealed, or depend on rank to be fed?”

15.

“To be content in poverty is to find wealth without gold. To be humble and unserved is to find honor without office.

Thus Master Yang floated upon the sea to purify his spirit. Hu Zi rejoiced to plow his own field.

Feng Bi suffered punishment for virtue. Xin Bu met ruin for merit. Yet a single branch is enough for a phoenix to rest upon — what need is there for a vast forest? A single pool suffices for the dragon's scales, why long for the great sea?

Coarse herbs are finer than rare delicacies. Cold springs taste better than spiced wine. Woven sandals are lovelier than red slippers. A simple robe surpasses brocade.

A wooden staff is safer than the jeweled axe. The music of the trees is sweeter than flutes and zithers.

A thatched hut outshines painted pillars. Rough beams are dearer than carved rafters. A mountain peak becomes your terrace, a cliff your grand hall. Scrolls of writing make your granary, pure discourse your gold and jade.

Abandon the petty loves of common men, cast aside the desires of servants. Wander the nine marshes and breathe joy. Let go of cleverness and sever from the dust.

Be like the inchworm that bends to advance, hide your brilliance and keep to the simple. Show clumsiness, appear slow, know contentment and rest.

Then you may chew the fragrance of the mushrooms, ride the wind and float upon clouds. Bathe in the light of the nine suns, rise with wings into the heights. Rest upon the phoenix tree, descend to the dark isles below.

What compares to this, to bite the bit and wait in the stable, to wear embroidery and become a sacrifice at the altar?"

16.

The nobleman of Urged Ambition said:

“To go in and never withdraw is to drown in favor and forget retreat. To go out and never return is to abandon duty and lack righteousness.

The enlightened know their body is not their own; they act as the time requires.

They speak or are silent as needed, move or stay still according to the moment.

When gifts gather and torches blaze in the court, the way of the gentleman rises, it is Heaven’s time to be seen.

But when the world is caught in slander and turmoil, then one must close the door and hide the tongue.

When the dragon ascends or the phoenix folds its wings, each follows the season’s change.

Thus the ancients sometimes withdrew from danger and refused to enter, or departed quickly without delay — fearing that the fires on Mount Wu might consume the orchids of virtue.”

17.

“But now the Holy Emperor governs the realm. The world is calm and the Way flows freely. His kindness reaches all beings, his benevolence spreads with the wind. His awe moves even spirits and ghosts, his grace extends to the farthest lands.

He carries the virtue of the earth in his depth, and the strength of Heaven in his height. His divine influence moves like clouds and rain, his mysterious blessing spreads like mist and dew.

The four gates stand open and harmonious, the ruler himself seeks the excellent to bring order to the world.

This is the meeting of a thousand years, the rarest harmony of time.

And yet you, Master, cling to the one-sided purity of reclusion. You do not see the danger of excessive withdrawal.

You cultivate the inward like Shan Bao, yet perceive not the perils beyond your door.

You hear that some drown when they cross water, and so declare that all sailors must perish. You see the treachery of Shang Chen, and so say all heirs are doomed to rebellion. Such thinking is too narrow.”

18.

Master Cherishing Ice said:

“Truly, your praise of sacred governance is not mistaken. But in matters of coming forth and remaining hidden, each person follows the inclination of his own heart.

In the age of Yao and Shun, Ji and Ying still nested in trees. When the Xia kings ruled, the virtuous recluse of the wilds still held his plow.

Do you think they feared the dangers of their age? No, they simply followed what gave them peace.

Thus those who elevate their spirit do not serve princes. Those who abide by the images of the Way hold fast to their own destiny.

Even the man who guards the border of Yan, if steadfast in his integrity, is praised by sages. Why then should I be condemned for remaining still?”

19.

“I wander in fields and gardens, I hide my traces in grass and marsh. It is not from disdain of rulers or flight from duty, but because my nature is unfit for office, my abilities poor for governing men.

Now the court is filled with worthies and heroes, scholars and warriors like scales upon a fish. All affairs are at peace and ordered.

Why should I push myself among the sun and moon, adding a single spark to their great light? Why strike a small kettle beside a vast bell, or offer a paper fan in the heart of winter?

If I forced myself to take part, I would soon be cast aside as useless, mocked for acting out of season.

But through writing and teaching, I can preserve the true and nurture the right. Though my path differs from those who serve in office, the aim is one — to benefit the people.

The lesser man keeps his small integrity whole, how could I compare with the purity of Xu You who washed his ears?

Yet this holy age is broad and forgiving. Even I, dwelling beyond the city gates, am allowed to remain free. Is that not enough?”

20.

Then the nobleman of Urged Ambition, struck with awe, changed his tone and said:

“Master, your words assist the teaching and your writings uphold righteousness. You raise up calm and stillness to restrain the frenzy of the age. You revive the Way of the sages where the subtle sayings had grown faint.

If no one goes forth, who will guide the rites of men? If none withdraw, who will teach the innocence of youth?

Under Heaven and within the lands, all are subjects of the same ruler. Why must one holding a scepter be deemed right, and one content in hunger be deemed wrong?

Those who wander lost in the clouds must look to the compass to find their way. Those who drift upon the sea must watch the stars to steer home.

Now that I have heard your virtuous instruction, my blindness is gone. I will bear my robe and cap upon my back, and follow the track of the noble horse.

I will learn to love all men and to advance with measure. I will no longer choose by pride or haste.”

Chapter 2 - The Recluses (逸民)

1.

The Master said,

“In former times I journeyed through the Cloud-Platform Mountains and met a Hidden Man. An official was also present there.

The official said,

‘The Radiant One rules above, governing the eight directions. The lands of Hua and Yi all return to his virtue, the distant regions all serve in peace. Yet you, sir, wander like Bocheng of old, dwelling among birds and beasts.

The ages have changed, customs are not the same. What once was noble purity is now called flight from duty.

A wise man sees danger before it forms, cuts off misfortune before it arrives. Are you not leaving the fire within to flee to frost without? You escape small troubles, yet forget greater peril. You avoid shallow mud, yet fall into an abyss. You step away from wet feet, yet leap into the furnace without knowing it.’”

2.

The Hidden Man replied,

“He who sharpens his will upon catching mice knows nothing of the tiger’s heart. He who busies himself with grain in the courtyard cannot see the flight of the phoenix.

The moth laughs at the great roc, the morning mushroom mocks the cypress that lives a thousand years, the frog in the well doubts the sea turtle, the snake in the pit sneers at the dragon of heaven.

You are bound by fear and persuasion. How could you know the vast tone of the Mysterious?

I am fortunate to live in an age like that of Yao and Shun. Why should I worry that my way cannot be fulfilled?”

3.

The official said,

“In the past, when the proud recluse Hua refused to serve, Duke Tai slew him. If you hide yourself now, is it not dangerous?”

4.

The Hidden Man said,

“Lü Shang was skilled in war but lacking in rule. He could not model Heaven and Earth to support the world, nor equal the seas and mountains in broad virtue.

He exalted punishment but neglected benevolence. Thus the seeds of bloodshed were sown from the beginning of his reign.

When the Duke of Zhou heard this, he knew such a state would not endure.

Attack and defense are not the same, the Way lies in knowing change. Lü Shang lacked the art of balancing strength and peace. He sought distant wars, devised strategies, and in doing so destroyed the lofty and the pure.

He was like one who relies on armor to prove his sword, or like one who swims yet also shoots from horseback, confused in both, failing in all."

5.

"To destroy the nests of common birds is to drive away the phoenix. To drain the ponds of turtles and fish is to make the dragons flee. To cut open the wombs of beasts is to banish the unicorn. To harm a single man of worth is to make heroes avoid the land.

Lü Shang founded a dynasty and left a model for rulers, yet also opened the path of cruelty. He drove the noble to other lands and cast the wise into exile.

Those who bought horse bones to bring swift steeds, those who visited poor huts to end wars, are far nobler than he.

Tell me, would you compare Lü Shang with the Duke of Zhou?"

The official said, "I cannot judge."

6.

The Hidden Man said,

"The Duke of Zhou was a great sage. Though noble, he humbled himself before the lowly. He feared to lose worthy men. He received seventy scholars from humble dwellings, ten teachers, and twelve close friends, none forced into office.

If Lü Shang had held the Duke's place, these men would have died in the marketplace, their flesh rotting in the ditches."

7.

"Yao could have compelled Xu You and Chaofu, yet he did not. Shun could have forced Shan Zhong and Shi Hu, yet he did not.

Yu could have pressed Bocheng Zigao, yet he did not. Tang could have detained Bian Sui and Wu Guang, yet he did not.

Wei Wen could have restrained Qian Mu, yet he did not. Jin Ping could have bound Hightang, yet he did not.

They honored the recluses because the hundred ways of life differ, and hearts cannot all be the same. They cherished virtue and were ashamed to harm the good.

Taking them by force would not increase their power. Releasing them brought no loss. By following their will, the rulers spread virtue and restrained greed.

Would you rather have fawning flatterers and greedy courtiers, or men who shame the corrupt by their purity?

The six sages never attacked hermits with harsh words. How would they ever strike them with blades?

Thus Lü Shang was gravely mistaken."

8.

"Though Emperor Gao of Han lacked refinement and study, his heart was vast and forgiving. He bore no grudges and accepted all.

He longed for the Four Elders of Shangshan, yet did not coerce them. When the Crown Prince humbly invited them, he praised him for it.

He sang the ‘Yellow Swan’ in sadness, rejecting jealousy and craving. His love of the hidden and his honor for the pure were beyond compare.

Therefore he, though once a commoner, became ruler of the world. His greatness lay in his capacity to contain all things.”

9.

“Lü Shang killed Hua because he feared rebellion. Yet the world’s disease lies not in those too still, but in those too hasty to rise.

Few are content with poverty and low rank.

If hermits are sometimes admired, many still cling to wealth and fame. Since the dawn of time, there have been countless men, yet few can forget riches and honor.

Even Confucius studied under Laozi but could not practice non-action. Zigong learned beside Yuan Xian yet could not share his poverty.

The Four Wicked Men lived beside the pure, yet did not follow them. Wang Mang lived in the same age as the Gong brothers, yet could not imitate them.

People, even when beaten or threatened, will not pursue Hua’s path, yet they fear his example might harm society.

Lü Shang did not understand this. He used the laws of war in times of peace and killed the worthy.

His error was deep. Only his great achievements saved him from ruin."

10.

"Before meeting King Wen, Lü Shang too was a recluse. The people despised him, old women chased him, his wares went unsold, his fishing brought no catch. No one admired him.

If King Zhou had arrested him for fleeing the world, would he not have died unjustly?

Later, Emperor Wu of Wei was fierce and quick to kill, yet when he wished to employ Zhuge Liang, and Liang refused, he said, 'It is not right to force a sage to serve in a sullied court.'

Though he conquered the realm, he did not act wrongly in that."

11.

"The world has long been restless. Men now rise through bribes or parties, the great Way fades, learning declines. Wealth alone is sought for survival.

If a man of virtue stays home and studies the Way, he should be sought out and honored, to revive humility.

Sun and Wu won battles through one mind. A single strategist was worth ten thousand soldiers.

Likewise, great scholars need not govern directly. Left in the mountains, they mold youth and spread respect and ritual.

Why use elephants to hunt mice, or harness phoenixes to blow bellows?”

12.

The Hidden Man continued,

“You guard the ant mound and play in fox dens, yet you have not ascended the Windy Heights or looked upon the rainbow clouds.

You wade in shallow pools, never having crossed the southern seas.

The true man of will does not seek rank or fame. The highest have no self, the next have no name.

They soar beyond all measure. They cut away what others cannot.

They are pure and still, unstained by title or gain. Their virtue cleanses the dust of ages. Their integrity stirs future generations.

Why must they wear red robes or fragrant silks? Why feed upon delicacies or seek honors?

Morning burns like fire, evening turns to ash. Why cling to what fades so swiftly?”

13.

“The sparrow does not trade its bramble nest for the clouds. The kingfish does not leave its valley for the sea.

The tiger grows sorrowful in a cage. The swan grieves upon the mountain.

Each being finds joy in what suits it.

The worldly man trembles when a day passes without a ruler, yet Heaven’s jewels and forests remain at peace.

Must fish dwell in trees, or birds swim in pools?

Retirement and withdrawal are honored by the sages. Each follows his own delight.”

14.

“The true worth of a scholar lies in establishing virtue and word.

To be filial, friendly, humane, righteous, pure, and steadfast is to establish virtue.

To write brightly of the classics is to establish word.

Good men like Shan Zhong ruled no states, yet were greater than vulgar officials. Confucius led no armies, yet was not lesser than Han Xin or Bai Qi.

To keep both body and name whole is highest.

To live hidden in contentment is praised by the ancients.

Yi Yin and Bo Yi did not bend or flatter. They would not bow to disgrace.

Mencius said that the rank of Heaven is nobler than seals and ribbons.

Those who cultivate virtue and reject glory are greater than princes.

Yet the world fears power and values profit. Great virtue is left in obscurity. Small talent gains high post.

Some risk death for fleeting fame. Some trade their bodies for a single day's praise.

How distant they are from the man who values one hair of righteousness above the wealth of the world."

15.

The official said,

"Those who hide from the world, who live in the mountains and avoid service, are of no use to the world. Are they not worthless?"

16.

The Hidden Man said,

“The unicorn does not bark to guard gates. The phoenix does not crow at dawn. The yellow horse does not pull the plow. The corpse-priest does not cook the meal.

The sun warms all, yet it does not light the night. The fire gives light, yet it does not shine by day.

Both are needed, yet each has its place.

The seas cover the earth, yet cannot water a single garden. A well waters the field, yet cannot move the clouds.

Each has its measure. Each fulfills its role.”

17.

“Jie and Zhou were emperors. Confucius was a minister. To be compared with tyrants angers men. To be compared with Confucius pleases them.

Therefore, nobility does not depend on rank.

Mencius said that if Yü, Ji, and Yan Yuan changed places, they would be the same. Zai Yu said that Confucius surpassed Yao and Shun.

Virtue alone distinguishes them, not office.”

18.

“The man united with Spirit moves with creation. Heaven and Earth rest within his heart.

The affairs of the world do not cling to his mind. Praise and blame do not trouble his purity.

Common desires cannot stain his spirit. Common delusions cannot move his will.

Glory is but a tumor. All things are as fragile as a cicada’s wing.

How could such a one bend his body or flatter the crowd?

Would he dip his hand into what he does not love? Would he gather what he has abandoned?

Would he smile to gain favor, bow to avoid harm, or stoop like a dragon used for drills, a great drum beaten like a toy?”

19.

“Gu Gong cast away his staff and fled into the mountains. Yue Yi hid himself in caves. Ji Zha turned to farming. Lao Lai tended his garden.

They followed what pleased them and none could change them.

Purity unmixed is true wealth. Freedom from service is true honor.

To hold office is merely to earn salary. It is not true nobility.

The higher the post, the heavier the burden. The greater the merit, the more envy it draws.

Only poverty is safe from rivals. Only simplicity can last without fear.”

20.

“To wash one’s robe and eat simple fare, to live by beans and wild greens, to bear the mockery of the vulgar, is still better than the rich who drown in luxury.

Better to breathe the classics, to feed the mind with the plow, to find fullness beneath the sky, to rest on a single branch.

When all things return to dust, simplicity remains.

To eat coarse food and wear plain cloth, to be free from sorrow and joy. This is true joy, beyond comparison.”

21.

“Those who serve seek fame. Yet writing can preserve a name, poems can express the heart. Why rely on chroniclers or bronze cauldrons?

Mencius did not fight battles. Yang Yun did not rule states. They sought virtue and found it. Is that not enough?”

22.

The official said,

“If recluses do not serve the ruler, should they still live in his land and eat his grain?”

The Hidden Man said,

“When Yan Hui died, the Duke of Lu wished to mourn him personally. He asked Confucius. Confucius said, ‘All within the state are subjects.’

So the duke mourned him with royal rites.

Thus we know that all under Heaven are the ruler’s people.

Those at court serve by action. Those in the mountains serve by virtue.

The ruler has no outside. All is his realm.

How could one live beneath Heaven and not share its grain?”

23.

“The gold of the mountains and the pearls of the rivers do not rest in the treasury, yet they belong to the ruler.

So the recluse, though apart from court, is still within the state.

Xu You did not flee beyond the seas. The Four Elders did not leave the world.

Thus all people are subjects of the sovereign.

Those who live purely in the huts of grass and chant the ancient Way teach the people humility and restrain greed.

This too was approved by Yao and Shun.

Yi and Qi starved rather than eat Zhou's grain, Bao Jiao died on a bridge. Their stubbornness is not worth imitating."

24.

"In later times, emperors sought the hidden with gifts of silk and jade.

Emperor An invited Zhou Yanzu. Emperor Huan invited Wei Xiuming. Emperor Shun invited Yang Zhongxian, yet they did not come.

Wei Wen invited Guan You'an, who refused. Emperor Huan invited Han Boxiu, who refused.

They were all treated with respect, not with force.

Thus those emperors were right to honor the recluses, and Lü Shang's killing of Hua was a cruel and wrongful act."

25.

The official was moved and sighed, saying,

“Now I understand. The way that transcends the world is beyond the grasp of the ordinary.”

Chapter 3 - Encouragement to Study(勖學)

1.

The Master said,

“Study is what clarifies and purifies one’s nature, what shakes away dust and confusion, what carves and refines rough jade, what sharpens dullness, what opens understanding and brightens the mind.

It adorns the plain with virtue, reveals the past and foresees what is to come, deepens discernment and strengthens caution.

Through it, one comprehends human affairs and the kingly way.

With it, one can advance to serve the state or withdraw to protect oneself.

Thus the sages and worthies have all pursued it tirelessly, working at it day and night, unceasing even through hunger, cold, and hardship.

They did not study for worldly reward, but because they loved it by their own nature.”

2.

“The crafts of carving and painting, or of riding and archery, though simple, still require practice before skill appears.

How much more so the vastness of human principle, the distance of the Way and virtue, the changes of Yin and Yang, and the hidden workings of spirits.

These are deep and remote, truly difficult to grasp at birth.

Even if color is white, without dye it is not bright. Even if taste is sweet, without blending it is not rich.

Unpolished jade does not shine at night, unpainted figures do not become vivid.

Fire will not burn without drilling or fanning, water will not flow without being opened or gathered.

Though potential lies within us, perfection depends on cultivation.

Only after climbing to the heights of heaven can one know how dark and narrow the well is.

Only after studying the Classics and the Hundred Schools can one feel how difficult it was to face the wall."

3.

"To seek knowledge without learning is like wishing for fish without a net. The heart may be diligent, yet nothing is gained.

To broaden learning and exhaust principle is like sailing with the wind. The body need not labor, yet the journey goes far.

Powder and paint make Xi Shi more beautiful and conceal her flaws.
Deep study makes the talented clear-sighted and awakens the dull.

The fine wood cannot become a palace without the craftsman's frame.
A man may be naturally bright, but without knowing right and wrong,
he cannot be called a gentleman."

4.

"To cross a thousand miles in a morning, one must borrow swift feet.
To cross great waves and reach distant shores, one must depend on
boats and oars.

To see beyond all limits while sitting at home, one must study books.
To understand the depths without straining the spirit, one must follow
a wise teacher.

Red and green transform plain silk. Instruction transforms ignorance.

When one spreads the dark clouds of study and lifts the bright light of
truth, all things reveal their form.

When one unrolls bamboo and silk to examine past and present,
Heaven and Earth hide nothing of their patterns.

How much less can spirits and men conceal themselves.

Even mud can be hardened into clay as strong as metal. Crooked wood can be shaped to line and square. Beasts can be trained for battle. Animals can learn to advance and retreat. Fish can be stirred by sound. Stones can be moved by sincerity.

How much more can man, who bears the Five Constants and the most spiritual essence, be transformed through learning."

5.

"Horses bow their heads by training, hawks strike by habit. Though the wild and the tamed are of one kind, the practiced become noble, the untrained remain base.

A flowing stream that never stops will merge with the sea. A pile of earth that never ceases will reach the mountain peak.

When the great river rises, dragons gather and play. When effort continues day by day, virtue stands and the Way is complete.

Then one awakens from ignorance and enters wisdom, not merely freed from confusion, but fully illumined."

6.

"Zilu once wore cock feathers and boar tusks, danced with his sword, and praised the strength of southern bamboo. He sought to trust in raw vigor alone.

But the Master gently guided him, shaping him through virtue, and in time he ascended the hall of learning and stood among the wise.

Zizhang was a common man, sly and rough, yet through gradual teaching he became a scholar of renown, honored even by princes.

Thus education refines even the coarse and raises them above mediocrity.”

7.

“Therefore the virtuous grieve that life passes quickly and fear to leave no trace.

They remember the teachings of dawn and awaken from delusion. They tremble at warnings that the bright may fall. They guard themselves from forgetfulness that leads to madness.

They do not waste the day in idle eating. They do not cast away a moment’s worth of effort.

They take the flowing river as their mirror and quick lightning as their warning.

They cut away useless desires and abandon the trivial affairs of men.

They cleanse the heart from worry and greed. They leave behind hunting, gambling, and leisure.

They shake off sleep and idleness and rise to walk the path of sages.

They gather knowledge through study and sharpen it through questioning.

They advance in virtue and polish their conduct.

They review the old and discover the new.”

8.

“The Duke of Zhou was the highest sage, yet read a hundred chapters daily.

Confucius was born with wisdom, yet the strings of his book bindings were thrice broken.

Mozi filled a carriage with writings. Dong Zhongshu never looked beyond his garden gate.

Ni Kuan tilled the fields while carrying his classics. Lu Sheng cut reeds to copy books. Huang Ba studied even in chains. Ning Zi doubled his labor from dawn to dusk.

Thus they reached the depths of the Way, measured the subtle words, saw all ages as one day, knew the eight directions as their own courtyard, examined the waxing and waning of the seven stars, traced the cycles of sun and moon, foresaw the rise and fall of times, judged right and wrong from the past, held the mystery and clarity within their palms, and discerned the unmanifest as if complete.

Therefore their virtue and achievements outshone the age, their light spread through eternity.”

9.

“They learned from the dance of the bird that calls the rain, from the cry of the swallow they knew the coming of spring.

They studied herbs to know flavor and medicine. They studied earth and beasts to know omens.

By reading the Lingbao, they knew the mountains’ secrets. By observing sacrifices, they understood ritual.

They read the stars to know Yin and Yang. They watched the crickets to know the calendar’s errors.

Where is the divine in this? It is only learning.

Even children’s songs aided the sages. How much more the deep and vast Classics.”

10.

“Talents differ in strength, minds differ in clarity.

Some understand early, some only after long teaching.

Quick learners are like steeds that race across the horizon. Slow ones are like quails that fly low.

Yet if the swift stop moving, they go no farther. If the slow move without rest, they will cross mountains and rivers.

Such is learning.

The young remember easily. The old forget quickly.

Therefore one should study early, while the mind is focused and habits form as nature.

Even if a man of great talent loses his chance in youth, he may still regain it later.

A late harvest is better than a barren field.

This is the lesson of the sun's light — though it sinks, it still gives warmth."

11.

"The world is troubled, and the Way of learning decays.

The patterns of wisdom and virtue wither away.

Many drown in music and pleasure, or chase gain in the streets.

The poor who still master the Six Arts are buried in obscurity.

The dull who follow fortune rise to the clouds.

Those who chase profit call it diligence.

Those who hold to principle are mocked as slow.

Thus all stain themselves in dust and frost, clutching gold and jade, rushing down crooked paths to reap reward by nightfall."

12.

"But those who close their doors and lift their minds through the Classics, who dwell in quiet and savor the Way, who hold firm and unbending character, who keep their color green after winter, who do not follow the crowd or float with the current — such men are few indeed.

Those restless for gain cannot leave the easy road and walk the steep path.

Therefore the riverbank is empty, and the Song of the Blue Collar was born from longing.

The compassionate grieve for this. The wise sigh in sadness."

13.

"Cold and heat alternate. Misfortune ends and fortune begins. The rule of the civil and the martial take turns. Such is the constant pattern.

I hope that the chaos will be cleansed, that renewal will come now.

When the seven stars return to order and the old land becomes new, let the heavenly broom sweep the world clean, let the great furnace of the sun refine all things.

Let peace spread through the empire. Let schools and learning flourish. Let music and virtue rise.

Then phoenixes will soar and horses of grace will run a thousand miles.

The hidden scholars and silent teachers will come forth again.

The songs of Yao and Shun will echo in the world, and benevolent winds will touch all without limit.

When punishments rest and harmony fills the air, and double grain grows in the fields, will that not be a joyful age?”

14.

“In the days of the Second Qin Emperor, learning was despised and the Way of the sages abandoned. The law of punishment ruled the people.

They saw no virtue, only death.

Thus they perished without knowing the path of return, and fell from the heights into the abyss.

Both rulers and subjects should take warning.”

Chapter 4 - Exalting Teachers (崇教)

1.

The Master said,

“He who stares too closely at a hair in autumn light cannot see the brilliance of the heavens.

He who gives his heart to small matters cannot perceive the vastness of the Confucian Way.

Those who play with fish forget the scent of orchids.

Those lost in the small cannot return to the great.

Wood that follows the carpenter’s line is never crooked.

Men who follow the teaching of the Way are never perverse.

Among the arts of order and governance, none surpass learning.

The breadth of study lies in not growing weary, and endurance in firm resolve.

If the will is not firm, the poor grow restless with survival, the rich are drowned in indulgence.

Thus the far-seeing and deep-learned appear but rarely through the ages, while those who face the wall crowd the roads shoulder to shoulder.”

2.

“If the humble scholar would toil by day in the fields to feed himself, and at night study by the light of firewood, and if the official, between feasts, would still seek books and instruction, then the world would not lack men like Shiyu, nor disciples like You and Xia.

But there are those who hunger and freeze, who lack even coarse greens, whose bodies suffer frost and wind, whose mouths are empty of grain, who have no coin for a teacher, yet still must care for their household.

If they put down the plow, the crops wither. If they take up the scroll, their family starves.

Though their studies fall short, who could blame them?

They are like horses of a thousand miles trapped beneath the salt cart, or fine steel that never reaches the forge of Ou Ye.”

3.

“But the princes and nobles live in ease and pleasure, wandering among silks and perfumes, never knowing the hardship of sowing and harvest.

Their eyes grow weary of dark and bright, their ears dulled by songs of Zheng and Wei, their noses sated with musk and orchids, their mouths spoiled by rich food.

In winter they are wrapped in fur and sable, in summer they float in gauze and silk.

They ride in light chariots like Qing Feng, they feast in painted halls bright with gold and jade.

Their pillars are painted red and green, their chests overflow with treasures.

They surround themselves with charm and music, drown in wine and dance.

In gatherings they lead the drinkers, in leisure they command the gamblers.

They see books yet understand them not, they meet scholars yet regard them as dust.

Their tongues falter for lack of reference, their minds confuse one thing with another.

In debate they soon yield, in doubt they grow pale before age.

Even the eloquence of Shang and Mai could not save them from blindness."

4.

The Master said,

"In ancient times, the heirs of emperors were always sent to the Grand Academy to receive teaching from masters.

To know how to serve as minister was to know how to rule as king.

To know how to be a son was to know how to be a father.

When learning stands firm, governance is upright.

To seek office without study is like handling knives without skill, as Zheng and Qiao lamented.

Those who indulge emotion and desire are called inhuman.

Yet the sons of nobles, born in deep chambers, raised by women's hands, have never known labor or fear.

Before leaving the cradle, they are given blue and purple robes.

Before their talents fit their crowns, they hold high office.

They wield the power of life and death, they decide honor and disgrace with their lips.

Love and hate shift without end, praise and slander fill their ears.

Suspicions arise from likeness, truth hides beneath falsehood.

Schemes twist from chance, cunning builds upon old trust.

Intrigues multiply without measure, beyond the count of wit or the tracing of ink.

Without method or learning, how can one discern truth from deceit, how can one know the ways of ancient and modern?

Without understanding, how can one escape the ruin of overturned nests and broken carts?"

5.

“The wise of old, though secure, never forgot danger.

They loved their sons and taught them rightly, carving and polishing their nature, not letting them fall to falsehood.

They chose clear teachers to model their growth, chose good friends to refine their character.

They urged them to read widely, showed them examples of success and failure, taught them to reflect on the past and see the present, to compare others and know themselves, to walk the straight path and stay within measure.

They trembled as if hanging from a height, they stood as if walking on ice.

Thus they avoided regret and preserved their fortune.”

6.

“In the past, the house of Dou prospered through reverence for teaching.

The house of Huo perished through arrogance.

Zhongshan and Dongping loved antiquity and were safe.

Yan and La fell by neglecting study.

The past is the mirror of the present.

Tang and Wu learned from Yi and Lü, and so they rose.

Xin and Gui followed the corrupt, and so they fell.

Friends and teachers must be chosen with care.

Seek men of plain life and pure virtue, who stand firm in poverty and inspire awe by their difference.

Their scholarship should be like Dong Zhongshu or Huan Rong, their strength like Gong Sui or Wang Ji.

Let them speak daily of loyalty and filial piety, point out the path of life and death, wash away stain and error, straighten what is bent, restrain passion and follow the law.

Thus will virtue enter the heart."

7.

"But at the end of Han and in the last days of Wu, it was not so.

Men were chosen for their caps and carriages, for fame and faction, not for worth.

They had the name of teacher and friend, but no substance of correction.

Not only did they give no benefit, they caused harm.

Their talk was not of virtue, but of novelty.

Their advice was not of loyalty, but of favor.

They delighted in new songs and charming voices, in delicate hands and graceful bodies.

They judged the purity of tones, the skill of instruments, the speed of horses, the grace of journeys, the beauty of women, the color of clothes, the fineness of carvings, the aim in games, the success in hunting and fishing, the loveliness of courtesans, the fashion of mounts and weapons.

They gathered strange things without limit.

Their excess grew day by day."

8.

"When they spoke of palaces, they compared them to jade towers and pearl halls.

They imitated Afang and Lin Guang.

A thousand gates seemed too few, Kunming Lake too shallow.

They laughed at thatched roofs as unworthy, called earthen steps crude and base.

The people's strength was spent on their pleasures.

The granaries emptied for their whims.

They piled earth to rival the mountains, they cut channels to mimic the nine rivers.

They built towers that pierced the clouds, windows that opened to the heavens.

Music blared and confused the ear.

Silken sleeves fluttered and dazzled the eye.

From the riverside to the northern streets, songs and dances never ceased.

They turned day into night, lost in drink and melody."

9.

"They built green shades of bamboo, they hunted wild birds on the outskirts.

They galloped up steep hills, they drove their servants beneath the burning sun.

They left by firelight and returned by starlight.

Government lay neglected. Rewards and punishments were abandoned.

They sailed boats across the wide waters, cast fine nets on the green streams, hung fragrant bait upon clear pools, sang as they fished, shot high to strike the flying swan, cast deep to pull the hidden fish.

They set nets in the forests and circles in the valleys, rode in scarlet plumes across the plains, let hounds tear at beasts, and hawks strike at birds.

Crossbows felled the mad ox. Spears pierced the tiger and bear.

Years passed in pleasure without end."

10.

"To this they added feasts in every season, banquets for welcome and farewell, receptions for guests of rank and pleasure.

Affairs of men multiplied without limit.

Thus the upright way grew distant, and indulgence became deep-rooted.

The Way of learning faded far beyond reach.

Few indeed could see the truth of rise and fall, few could lift themselves from corruption, few could abandon the perilous road of decayed virtue and return to the great Way of lasting order.

Alas, those who preserve the state and family are rare, while those who bring ruin are without number."

11.

"But now the enlightened ruler stands above.

He studies the ancients and aids the people.

He strengthens the dikes against overflow, he makes clear reward and blame.

It is hoped that the princes and nobles, the wealthy and honored, will strive together to esteem the Confucian Way, to cultivate learning and virtue, to set aside the idle words of Lao and Zhuang, and to devote themselves to the true path of the Six Classics."

Chapter 5 - The Way of the Ruler(君道)

1.

The Master said,

“Clear and pure vapors rise upward, while the turbid and heavy sink below.

Thus the order of high and low, noble and base, becomes manifest.

The sages of old took this from Heaven and Earth, and from it arose the way of ruler and minister.

They established offices and divisions of duty, and harmony spread through the realm.

The ruler must first perfect himself before governing the four seas.

He must remove partiality to uphold the royal Way, cast off private feeling to exalt pure justice, and embrace the universe to contain all differences.

When truth and falsehood are clearly seen beyond things, he then adds insight to self-awareness.

When his ear is keen to what comes to him, he further refines it by self-reflection.

He draws the line of justice to advance the good, he plucks the string of order to dismiss the wicked.

He makes virtue bright and blocks transgression.

He honors the worthy and draws close to the pure.

He lets the compass complete its circle, the square show its right angle, the line run straight, the ax cut true.

Then no talent is misplaced, no vessel fails its use.”

2.

“He examines names and verifies substance.

He reviews the diligent and consoles the weary.

He sets standards and rites to show the people their measure.

He judges praise and blame to encourage and restrain.

He makes the laws clear to prevent excess, and weighs the right and wrong to avoid obscurity.

When he gives, he gives without defying reason.

When he withholds, he withholds without injustice.

He molds all through the Six Arts, guides them by loyalty and faith, governs with kindness and harmony, and regulates through rites and law.

He suppresses the crooked and stirs the clear.

He lifts what is good and calms what is base.

Thus no matter strays from its path, no task exceeds its measure.

Ministers may not encroach on each other’s office.

Generals may not shrink from danger or neglect the royal command.

He wins the near with affection and gathers the far with virtue.

He enriches the people and opens the broad road of advancement.

He cuts off trickery and deceit, yet applies punishment with clarity and law with mercy.

When customs become pure, faults are hidden and the five teachings are practiced in gentleness.”

3.

“He unites the multitudes of scholars and warriors, builds harmony within his kin, makes the close and distant hold each other firm, as the body and limbs support one another.

The branches grow thick yet never harm the root.

The streams run full yet never turn from the source.

Mountains and rocks guard the frontiers and restrain ambition.

From the fall of the Three Miao he learns that rivers cannot be trusted alone.

From the ruin of Yi and You he sees that walls and cliffs are not enough.

Though the rivers still flow, Chu fell to disgrace.

Though the Sword Gate stood, Ziyang was destroyed.

The land of the Four Peaks and Three Mountains does not belong to one family.

Gold walls and boiling moats cannot compare with harmony among men.

The true defense lies not in mountains and seas, but in virtue and accord.”

4.

“Therefore the wise ruler fears insufficiency and corrects excess.

When plans succeed, he still thinks of danger.

When wars are won and lands enlarge, he still restrains pride and remains watchful.

He models the vastness of Heaven’s dome and the depth of Earth’s foundation.

He shines with bright virtue to reveal what is hidden.

He contemplates far ahead, before omens arise.

He warms the people with spring’s gentleness, and disciplines them with autumn’s firmness.

He examines reports from every province, weighs all words on the balance of fairness.

He empties his heart to hear the lowly, gives credit to encourage the future.

When he governs by skill, his work is complete.

When he orders by measure, all falls in harmony.

He stands lofty as the peak of Langfeng, beyond all judgment of weight and worth.

He is deep as the mysterious abyss, beyond all measure of nearness or size.

Then his virtue flows without end, and the talents of all his ministers are fully revealed."

5.

"When he issues command, his words roll forth like thunder, yet truth remains unmoved by flattery.

When he draws up laws, they shine like the seven stars, and affection cannot bend them.

His plans reach far, vast as clouds gathering high.

His will stands firm, rooted like Mount Song and Tai.

He foresees events before they appear, he discerns praise and blame before words are spoken.

He does not let simplicity be lost to artifice, nor unity be broken by division.

Though he decides alone, he still listens to the humble.

Though he is broad in tolerance, he guards his ear from corruption."

6.

"When the people suffer hunger and cold, he blames himself.

When they err, he takes the fault as his own.

If auspicious signs appear, he gives thanks to Heaven.

If disaster strikes, he recalls the fault of Sanglin and accepts the blame.

He does not hesitate to change when needed, nor feel shame in correcting his mistakes.

He watches like the tiger, alert to danger.

He approaches the distant like the unicorn, gentle and firm.

If no old man sings in joy while striking the earth, he feels shame at the lack of harmony.

If any family goes hungry, he blushes before his own full table.

When he sits in high towers, he worries for the laborers who built them.

When he tastes fine dishes, he fears the peasants missed their season.

When he listens to music, he checks his joy for excess.

When he sees splendid halls, he recalls the cruelty of taxation.

He wears the rough coat of Emperor Yao, the plain silk of Duke Wen.

He remembers the humble halls of Yu, the unbuilt terrace of Zhou.

He reflects on the ruin of Zhanghua, and the swift curse of Afang."

7.

"When he makes oaths, he remembers the shame of broken trust.

When he enjoys pleasure, he recalls how Daji led Zhou to ruin.

When he wages war, he measures strength and timing, so that no village weeps in vain.

When he punishes, he follows justice, so that no spirit cries for wrong.

He remembers the death of Duke Bo for reproving King Li.

He remembers the deceit that ruined Duke Huan.

He avoids the folly of King Xian in changing heirs.

He recalls Liu Biao who lost his line.

In hunting, he rejoices more to find the worthy than to catch beasts.

He delights in distant virtue more than in nearby game.

He guards against the slanders of jealous concubines, and the ruin caused by one woman's favor.

He recalls the tyranny of those who called deer horses, and the treachery of those who loved flattery.

He welcomes the honest counsel of the wise, as Emperor Gao welcomed Zhang Liang, and corrects his ministers as Emperor Jing punished Chao Cuo."

8.

"When sweet wine is offered, he remembers the warning of Yi Di.

When gentle indulgence tempts him, he recalls the folly of Lu and Qi.

He banishes flatterers like Zheng, and embraces kindness like the herdsman of the deer.

He learns from the white dragon to restrain lightness, and from the thin horse to know sufficiency.

He prevents intrigue among the palace women, and stops the quest for rare steeds beyond the borders.

He removes vicious hounds to curb drunken excess, and buys horse bones to draw men of talent.

He quells anger to encourage bravery, avoids folly to strengthen arms.

He heeds the words of upright men, and honors honest soldiers.

He cuts away useless finery, and cultivates true ability.

He quiets the sounds of flutes, and upholds the advice of the pure.

He dismisses the beautiful but deceitful, and drives out the charming but treacherous.

He keeps the fish in deep waters, and holds firmly the sword of authority.

He does not fear to gather wood early, to prevent the fire of ruin later.

He shapes the people through honesty and shame, and tests them through clear examination.”

9.

“In anger he does not exceed law, in joy he does not break rule.

Toward those he loves, if they offend, there is no pardon.

Toward those he dislikes, if they serve well, there is no neglect.

He lowers himself to receive loyalty, he listens to the hard word without avoidance.

He welcomes criticism and does not reject the humble.

He overlooks small flaws and values great service.

He forgets nearby offenses and remembers distant merits.

Thus the courage of Cao Gui and Meng Ming is revived.

The shame of Wei Shang and Zhang Chang is washed away.

The traitor becomes loyal. The vile becomes pure.

The barren salt marsh grows flowers. The muddy pond gives forth bright pearls.

Sharp blades are tempered. The nine virtues come into harmony.

He honors teachers and friends, respects elders to strengthen filial piety.”

10.

“Thus the hidden come forth like dragons rising from the deep, and the hermits descend from the hills to serve.

Within, ministers shine in loyalty.

Without, generals guard the borders like tigers.

The government stands upright above, and all things follow below.

Grace begins nearby and spreads afar.

The wise apply their strength.

The people yield in peace.

He cleanses the laws and revives pure wind.

He sends carriages and silk to call forth the worthy.

He gathers scholars to discuss gain and loss.

He reduces useless officials.

He ends the trade in corrupt profit.

He opens the gate of virtue.

He closes the road of rivalry.

He honors righteousness and simplicity.

Those who see his virtue rejoice as sprouts in spring rain.

Those who return to him flow as streams to the sea.

The people rest in peace like green leaves on solid boughs.

The distant lands turn toward him like stars to the North Pole.”

11.

“Thus the seven luminaries shine in harmony, the four seasons flow without confusion.

The four spirits appear, the sacred plants bloom.

Sweet dew falls from the sky, rich grain fills the granary.

The fiery demon is driven away, the black pest confined.

The rivers run calm, the winds rest gentle.

No frost strikes out of season, no people cry in grief.

The prisons stand empty, punishments sleep.

Even beyond the calendar’s reach and the nobles’ rule, those in fur and hides, in mountains and seas, rejoice and change their hearts.

Rare birds offer tribute at the crimson court.

Jade rings come from the farthest west.

The winds obey his virtue.

The distant echo his tone.

Such is the height of flourishing rule, the pattern of the Three and Five Kings.

Thus his ancestral temples endure without end, and his line prospers through a hundred generations.”

12.

“When roots are deep, branches flourish.

When the people rejoice below, the ruler rests above.

If the horses are not trained, even Zaofu cannot make them run a thousand miles.

If the people do not unite, even Yao and Shun cannot bring peace to all under Heaven.

When the horses tire, danger grows.

When the people suffer, rebellion rises.

Should one not watch with trembling heart?

Should one not be cautious as in the dark before dawn?

If the ruler does not ponder order and chaos, does not reflect deeply on signs of ruin, then though his eye discerns a hair’s tip, though his ear distinguishes the eight tones, though his pen glitters with pearls, and his sword cuts like lightning, though his mind holds a thousand texts, and his mouth speaks torrents of eloquence, still he cannot save a crumbling land or a broken wall.

Why? Because he ignores the great to pursue the small, he busies himself with the work of lesser men, and loses sight of the origin.”

13.

“If he truly can act amid abundance as though in peril, tread the ice as though it may break, remember danger in peace and death in life, hold the great principles and order the small, grasp the Way and govern many talents.

Let Han and Bai strive in war, let Xiao and Cao labor in statecraft, let every minister apply his strength, let every strategist offer his wisdom.

Then even if the ruler sits in jeweled chambers, drinks fine wine, and listens to endless music, he may still rule by stillness and govern through the worthy.

Why must he dwell in huts or eat coarse soup, labor like a servant, or wear himself to sickness, to spread virtue to the people and harmony beyond the seas?”

14.

“But the dark and confused ruler is not so.

He governs with kindness yet lacks firmness.

He rewards and punishes without order.

The upright are not praised, the wicked not reproved.

Or he rules with cruelty, all punishment and no grace.

His laws are heavy, his mercy none.

The foundations crumble, yet he deems himself as Heaven and Sun, comparing his stability to Mount Tai, believing that wisdom and virtue are easy to equal, that caution and reverence are trivial.

Thus the innocent suffer under false judgment.

The people see no virtue, only execution.”

15.

“He promotes only those who please him, and raises the familiar before the able.

The highest offices go to the kin of the empress.

Decisions fall to flatterers.

He distances true men of merit, and trusts in petty courtiers.

He suppresses the honest, and advances the eloquent but useless.

Those who govern the people grow corrupt.

Those who command the armies grow weak.

The greedy ruin the state.

The cowardly lose the frontiers.

Yet he never perceives or dares to remove them.

He clings to them in hope of later merit.

Small vessels bear heavy burdens and bring disaster.

Meanwhile, the wise and capable live in rags, their talents buried, their strength unused.

Thus the fall of kingdoms is many.”

16.

“He neglects the warnings of the Classics.

He spends his time in play and indulgence.

He looks down from tall towers, yet scorns virtue.

He opens wide parks, yet narrows his heart.

His ponds are deep, yet his grace is shallow.

He loves hounds and horses, yet hates honest speech.

He treasures gems, yet despises wisdom.

He adorns his silks, yet withholds charity.

He is slow to aid, yet quick to tax.

He hunts eagerly, yet neglects the fields.

He gathers riches, yet wastes lives.

He promotes actors, yet dismisses scholars.

He pampers favorites, yet neglects soldiers.

He drowns in sound and color, forgets his duties, drinks before judgment, feasts before counsel.

He overworks his people and withholds their reward.

He builds costly toys, and stores wasteful food.

When ruin comes, he blames Heaven.

When weakness grows, he blames men.

Yet fortune and misfortune arise from himself.

Tang and Wu proved this long ago.”

17.

“King Wen of Zhou buried exposed bones, and all praised his compassion.

King Zhou of Yin tore out the heart of Bi Gan, and the world cursed his cruelty.

Praise and blame come swiftly.

Gain and loss are not in numbers.

When praise is heavy, even distant tribes are drawn near.

When blame accumulates, even the loyal turn away.

Thus small good, though of little profit, must still be done.

Small evil, though bringing no danger, must still be removed.”

18.

“But if the ruler gives himself to pleasure and does not share joy with his people, then grief will come without comfort.

When the foundation is cut and the height unguarded, the fall of the top follows swiftly.

Then the reins slip from his hands, the mandate departs and does not return.

His strength is spent, his wealth exhausted, the people cannot bear their suffering.

Resentment rises below, Heaven’s wrath above.

Tian Cheng overthrew Qi from within, Ji Chang rose against Yin from the west.

The men of Chen and Wu lifted swords in rebellion, the lords of Liu and Xiang shook the empire.

Siege towers climbed the walls, swords clashed beneath the gates.

The armies broke within and without.

Then he laments the wise too late, seeks the hermit in the mountains, calls for Yi and Lü, invites Sun and Wu, praises the virtuous but none answer, asks for counsel but none reply.

It is like bringing water to a house already burned, or building boats when the flood has already drowned the halls."

19.

"The name of greatness cannot be seized through pride or built by indulgence.

Even the sacred rites of the Eastern Mountain were not pursued by whim.

The highest sages, though running with the chariot of Heaven, still feared to fall short.

Yet the mediocre ruler, who creeps slowly with loose reins, believes he surpasses them.

Some are safe yet think of danger.

Some are in peril yet imagine ease.

Some, having achieved peace, remain diligent.

Some, amid ruin, do not awaken.

Without the fall of Xin and Gui, how could we value the clarity of Tang and Wu?

Let this be remembered always.

Let this be guarded forever.”

Chapter 6 - The Conduct of Ministers(臣節)

1.

The Master said,

“In the age of Tang and Yu, when reverence for antiquity and clarity of wisdom prevailed, even they still relied upon the brightness and aid of their many lords, thus achieving the vast and towering success of their reigns.

Therefore the rule of the emperor was harmonious, the myriad labors came together as one, the four gates stood in solemn order, and all affairs followed their proper season.

The wild tribes caused no disorder among the civilized lands, and within the palace halls, phoenixes made their nests.

Just as the head and the limbs depend on one another, so do ruler and minister, though different in rank, share one body in mutual reliance.”

2.

“The ruler must measure ability before assigning office, so that none are ruined by burdens beyond their strength.

The minister must weigh his own talent before accepting charge, so that he avoids the calamity of failure.

Those who only bow and echo their lord’s voice are corpses dressed in silk.

Those who dare to speak against wrong, though it angers the throne, are the true wings of the nation.

Those who guess the ruler's intent and flatter his whims are the tongues of deceit.

Those who correct his faults and oppose his errors are the backbone of the state.

The loyal must be ready to face the axe or the boiling cauldron if the truth demands it.

If loyalty brings suspicion, or counsel brings punishment, it is right to depart and await a better age.

To die needlessly, adding only to the ruler's mistake, brings no benefit.

It is better to withdraw than to perish in vain."

3.

"In action, he follows not impulse but the guidance of the Classics.

In stillness, he abides by the laws and models of virtue.

He allows no place for private petitions, he applies the law without favor.

He is clear in punishment without letting anger rule, and precise in reward without letting affection sway.

He does not seek power through secret orders, nor speak of purity while harboring stain.

In office, he strives to correct falsehood, in retirement, he promotes the worthy without jealousy.

He rises early and sleeps late, troubled by the people's hardship.

He lives simply and restrains desire, as if walking upon thin ice.”

4.

“He offers plans and recommends men, but never boasts of his counsel.

He does not let profit without righteousness dwell in his heart.

At court, his bearing is upright and unbending, in private life, he is gentle and modest.

When danger comes, he forgets his home and risks his life.

When holding power, he stays even and impartial.

He models himself after Xiao and Cao in command, admires Zhang Liang and Chen Ping for their plans, follows Zhou Bo in loyalty, and learns the honest gaze of the two Baos.

He keeps the resolve of Ying and Hong, and the steadfastness of Tian and Yi.

He accepts the peril of fire and punishment for duty’s sake, and avoids the ruin that came to Han Ying for false devotion.

He works without complaint, returns without boasting, claims fault where he deserves praise, and yields precedence to others.

He serves with reverence as though Heaven’s awe were before his face, he is diligent by night and day as though the boiling cauldron stood beside him.”

5.

“When entrusted with the realm’s burdens, he takes Yi and Lü as his models.

When serving at the four borders, he follows Ji and Zhao in rule.

In sending or receiving envoys, he keeps his loyalty pure and unmoved.

When striking down rebellion, he acts swift as a hawk seizing its prey.

When defending the frontiers, he remembers Wei Jiang and Li Mu.

When governing the people, he mirrors Wen Weng and Xin Chen.

The truly loyal serve without thought of gain, how then could the wise ever mislead their ruler?

The truly righteous will sacrifice life and clan, how then could they fear disgrace or demotion?

Thus they preserve labor and honor, and bring glory to their kin.

Their names are sung in odes, their deeds engraved in bronze.

Yao and Ji were men like others, yet through duty they were exalted.”

6.

The Master said,

“When a minister’s merit is not great, he feels shame to receive heavy pay.

When his deeds are not abundant, he blushes to accept high rank.

He walks in faith and acts with harmony, he is aided by Heaven and man alike.

He fears excess and remains humble, thus ending in blessing.

He steps according to the rule of the Way, raises his hand in accord with law.

Though his rise may be slow, his honor endures.

But those who flatter below and deceive above, who trade duty for profit and favor, who agree with falsehood and laugh at evil, bring ruin upon ruler and state alike.

They delight the sovereign with amusements and lead him into vice.

They twist words to destroy good order, their smiles and smooth tongues please for a moment but blind the throne forever.

They block the road of worthy men and fill the court with traitors.

Though their talent may adorn their lies, and their eloquence conceal their crimes, their end is always the same, to die by the sword and see their homes in ashes.

Yet the foolish abandon the right for the wrong, cling to falsehood and shun truth, see disaster yet do not change, and still call their ruin Heaven's will.

But their punishment does not fall from Heaven, it is born from themselves."

7.

The Master said,

"The minister is to the ruler what the limbs are to the body.

When walking on ice or grasping fire, he may not refuse.

The ancients compared him to the earth, for when the earth is dug, springs appear, and when it is planted, the hundred grains grow.

The living stand upon it, the dead return to it.

He labors much without seeking reward, endures fatigue without complaint.

To know this art is to know the secret of self-preservation."

8.

The Master said,

"When the duties of ministers are well divided, the realm is orderly.

When too many powers are gathered, confusion arises.

Without the strength of a champion, one cannot bear the weight of many men's tasks.

Without the spirit of ten thousand, one cannot rule over diverse offices.

Thus Marquis Han was punished for exceeding his post, and Zi Yuan feared the ruin of overburden.

But if one has unmatched talent, skill in both writing and arms, with wisdom within for counsel, and strategy without for war, then though affairs are many, success increases.

If no one else can take his place, then it is right he bear such charge.

But if he lacks the vessel for it, he should withdraw and measure himself, for a weak cart will break under weight.

Common men crave rank and forget peril, and so perish themselves and drag down their kin.

All avoid the wood before it is cut, yet none decline offices beyond their reach.

Alas, Chen Li became warning for those of small strength, and Zhang Liang withdrew to escape the danger of excess.”

Chapter 7 - Good Regulations (良規)

1.

The Master said,

“The bird that flies and perches without choosing its tree will surely fall into the hunter’s net.

The man who enters service without judging his time will surely meet danger and disgrace.

When time is favorable, one rises like a dragon soaring through the clouds.

When time is lost, one is left like a great fish stranded upon dry land.

Therefore the wise conceal their talent and wait, they hide their form and act when the moment comes.

When high cliffs are about to crumble, they cannot be bound by a silken thread.

When the gate of dragons boils and roars, it cannot be stopped by a handful of clay.

Thus they do not gamble upon misfortune, nor cast themselves into peril for luck.”

2.

The Master said,

“When the Duke of Zhou held the throne for the young king, when Yi Yin deposed Tai Jia, when Huo Guang removed the Prince of Changyi, when Sun Chen retired the young emperor, these were said to have used expedient power to preserve the state.

Yet the Duke of Zhou was slandered and driven away, the road filled with rumors.

Yi Yin in the end met execution, a thick fog shrouded the land for three days.

Huo Guang nearly perished, his clan soon was destroyed.

Sun Chen’s shade had not moved from its mulberry tree before his head and feet were parted.

Their laughter was not yet forgotten, and already their cries filled the air.”

3.

“When danger arises and one does not uphold what is right, what use is such a minister?

Seven disputing courtiers cannot save a wicked king.

Thus men like Wang Mang found their chance for treachery, adorning deceit with tales of old, while within they hid the hearts of wolves.

From Yi and Huo began this ruin.

Future rulers and gentlemen should ponder this deeply.

To depose a lord is a small obedience but a great rebellion; such acts cannot endure.

Even Duke Zhao, who deceived his king, was judged and cast down.

How much more the man who removes his sovereign, can that be called right?

These men complete their plans and briefly taste success, yet in time the curse returns.

Those who conspire in secret, then sell their masters for gain, end with their clans destroyed and their altars cut off, though their houses may for a while be ennobled.”

4.

“When treacherous flatterers grow proud and bring disorder, as Gan and Tui served Jie, or Chong and Lai aided Zhou, or the party of Li supported Li the Cruel, then to change rulers and restore the worthy is not difficult.

Remove the wicked from the ruler’s side, send the corrupt clans to the far borders.

Hold the army and guard the realm, walk the straight path and keep the law.

Be firm as the axe-handle, upright as the rule and cord.

Reward clearly and punish justly, pardon none who offend.

Appoint the virtuous, employ the able, serve only the loyal.

Do nothing on your own authority, act only after counsel.

If the ruler errs, correct him by reason.

Be cautious and reverent, never forgetting respect.

Thus the altars of the land are made secure above, and the minister himself is safe below.

When the work is complete, retire in humility, request leave to rest your bones.

Recommend the loyal and the worthy to take your place, is this not already abundant merit?

Why then seize the imperial seals, and endanger the lord whom you serve?”

5.

“The ruler is Heaven, the ruler is Father.

If a ruler may be overthrown, then Heaven too could be changed, and a father replaced.

The man whose merit overshadows the world receives no reward, for his very fame endangers him.

Though his victories be great and his deeds without rival, yet when the birds are gone the bow is put away, when the hares are caught the hound is cooked.

How then could one depose his lord and hope to be loved by the next?

It is as if a son cast away the parent who bore him, taking another’s nurture, and claiming himself filial saying, ‘My father was unfit for service, so I left him.’

Though he daily offers sacrifice and attends morning and evening, could such a man be trusted or pitied?”

6.

“The followers of Huo Guang, though honored at the time, though raised in rank and given lavish rewards, gained favor only by cunning. Was that true loyalty?

To dismiss one’s wife and slander her former husband, to buy a slave and revile his master’s cruelty, even common men would find this shameful.

Why? Because it wounds one’s own kind, and such is against natural feeling.

Thus Le Yang, for his hardness of heart, was shunned, and Qin Xi, for his indulgence, was loved.

Yet the world praises Tang and Wu as just, and calls Yi and Huo virtuous, this is to encourage rebellion by example."

7.

"Moreover, the deposed king is not always without fault.

Some advisors of young rulers wielded power and fortune, their crimes were heavy, their wickedness vast.

Fearing that they might later bring harm, others removed them while their strength yet held.

They acted for their own safety, not for the state.

When they held authority, life and death were at their word.

Once the ruler was deposed, the sacred vessel was gone, and all guilt of the act fell upon them.

They knew it so, yet who would dare to speak?

Without a Zhu of Dongmou or a Donghu to bear witness, who can judge?

In later ages none will resolve it.

Only the truly perceptive will see that the evil of Jie and Zhou was not so great, nor the virtue of Tang and Wu so pure."

8.

"The codes and canons all teach that ruler must be honored and minister kept low, that Heaven is beyond vengeance.

The meaning of the Spring and Autumn is that Heaven cannot be defied.

The great sages wrote the Classics to show that a man should serve his father and his lord as one.

To permit the act of deposing a ruler opens the gate of rebellion.

When the lower attacks the upper, how can the people be taught order?

Shallow scholars, sunk in cunning debate, twist their tongues like eels in the fish market, praising Tang and Wu for eating the liver of kings, and calling those who condemn them ignorant of expedience.

They claim rebellion is wisdom, saying, ‘To start good is not to violate right.’

But they do not see that to betray justice is to destroy the root of virtue.”

9.

“In earlier ages, those who wrote of such things failed to divide right from the Way.

Thus men of such thought stand upon the edge of a blade, they climb the crumbling cliff.

It is no path for long life or distant peace.

Though for a while their commands bring honor, their rewards flow like torrents, it is no different than a sacrificial ox painted in colors, or a fish that loves the weeds of the shallows.

It is like the thirsty who long to drink the wine of the clouds, or the hungry who seek to feed on shadows.

Yet the writers of history together praise them, making fair tales of unpunished crime, calling rebellion ‘understanding change’.

This leaves the thoughtful forever grieved.”

10.

“Some have warned me that these words offend the sages, and will bring reproach.

I answered, ‘Shun and Yu were tested within and without before they inherited the charge of their ancestors.

Even if one dislikes what wounds the sages, how can truth harm them?

In former days Yan Yannian in open court impeached Huo Guang as unrighteous.

The court stood silent and none could refute him.

If I, speaking for the lesson of the age, point to no man by name, what fear need I have of mere reproach?’”

Chapter 8 - The Difficulties of the Times (時難)

1.

The Master said,

“To give one’s full loyalty without concealment is always possible.

But to speak and be heard, to act and remain unharmed, depends upon the time.

When the age is dark, the wicked and jealous resent those who surpass them.

They crowd close to the ruler and suppress the worthy below.

They hate the upright and detest the just, fearing that open virtue will expose their crookedness.

Thus they strive to remove those better than themselves to escape their own punishment.

An enlightened ruler does not appear in every generation.

A foolish sovereign cannot tell black from white.

He cannot accept loyal counsel or employ the truly beneficial.

If one speaks truth, he may instead incur danger.

So flatterers like Hong Gong and Shi Xian use clever words to create false likenesses.

They borrow the name of fairness to sell their private deceit.

Thus the one who presents the art of long life gains the penalty of immediate death.

The one who brings plans to secure the state finds himself ruined for his service.

Therefore it is said,

‘It is not hard to speak right words, it is hard to find the right time to speak them.’”

2.

“To persuade the wise ruler with virtue is difficult, yet sometimes accepted.

Thus Yi Yin counseled Tang for seventy years before being heeded.

But to reason with the foolish is useless, for the wise words of Wen failed to move King Zhou.

When words are unheeded, one may still endure.

But when wisdom brings peril, how can one escape?

Li Si executed Han Fei.

Pang Juan mutilated Sun Bin.

Shangguan destroyed Qu Yuan.

Yuan Ang brought ruin upon Chao Cuo.

Such cases are beyond number.

To serve as a minister is no easy road.

There is not one single way to survive.

Those who go forth and never return leave fame after death.

Those who hide their gifts and wait for the moment may live, but rarely meet their chance.

Great ministers of lasting merit appear only once in an age.

But the fallen and frozen fill the pages of history.

Alas, how hard it is to meet the proper time!

Because of this I know that men like Lü Shang by the Wei River, or Fu Yue among the cliffs, though they held the talent to guide kings and the power to rule a world, yet spent their lives fishing or building walls among common men, never meeting a Tang or a King Wu — such men are beyond reproach.”

Chapter 9 - The Principles of Governance (官理)

1.

The Master said,

“The galloping steed runs free by the hand of Zaofu, and the works of Yu and Ji ordered the hundred offices because they served under the wise rulers of Tang and Yu.

Thus they achieved success without toil and harmony through simple courtesy.

But when Zang and Pi drove proud horses, or King Zhou ruled over the three worthies, they wished to advance swiftly yet held the reins too tight, they wished to offer loyal counsel yet disaster came at a word.

Therefore the chariot overturned upon the steep road, and the state fell never to rise again.

Fine steeds fail under clumsy drivers, and wise men stumble in dark ages.

Even Confucius could not prevent the lord of Lu from departing, and Yan Ying could not stop Cui Zhu’s rebellion.

The talent was right, the ruler was not.”

2.

“The ruler is like a vessel, the minister like what it must contain.

If the vessel is small and the contents great, they cannot be joined.

A child may abandon gold to chase a butterfly.

A man of Yue may throw away rare delicacies and eat frogs.

He suffers not from the lack of pleasure but from ignorance of value.

What is not employed, though precious, becomes worthless.

What is not shared, is easily destroyed.

In ancient days the ruler of Wei trembled to hear wise words, and the lord of Qin slept through lofty discourse.

Yet they hoped to restore peace and gather worthy men.

This was like walking backward to pursue the swift, or traveling toward Chu while taking the road to Yan.”

Chapter 10 - On Upholding the Upright/Correct (務正)

1.

The Master said,

“The southern sea draws all rivers into its depth without measure, and the lofty plateau of the dark garden piles its roots to touch the sky.

The great summer palace rises above the clouds because many beams support its height.

The wheel turns true and the axle straight because nothing is missing from its design.

Thus when Yuan Kai served as minister, heavenly order was achieved.

When masters of balance and strategy were employed, strife and rebellion ceased.

This is why Shun and Yu possessed the world without striving, and why even the arrogant lord of Wei was not destroyed.”

2.

“When many strengths combine, no burden is too heavy to lift.

When many minds unite, no labor is too great to settle.

A body with many limbs may tire yet not collapse.

A realm with many scholars may suffer disorder yet not perish.

A sword and spear are not suited to weaving, nor are needles and awls meant to strike.

Cattle and horses cannot bark to guard the gate, and hens and dogs cannot pull the chariot.

When each serves by his strength, no task fails.

When each avoids his weakness, no talent is wasted.”

Chapter 11 - On Honoring the Worthy (貴賢)

1.

The Master said,

“He who crosses the boundless sea without a strong boat cannot hope to reach the shore.

He who wishes to bring peace without wise ministers cannot hope to succeed.

The flight of swans and phoenixes depends on the strength of their six wings.

The dragon’s rise through the clouds depends on the gathering of wind and mist.

Therefore the ruler’s chief duty is to seek out the worthy, and the noble’s highest wish is to achieve merit through service.

If one delights in settled peace and ignores the men of wisdom, it is like wishing to travel far while discarding fine horses.”

2.

“To raise those neglected in the fields, to bring forth men hidden from sight, to assign them offices suited to their talent and reward them by their deeds. This is how a ruler honors the worthy.

To labor early and late for the good of all, to devote the heart and strength to every department, to promote the good and dismiss the evil, and to withhold nothing of what one knows. This is how a minister repays his lord.

There are hermits who may live without kings, but no ruler can govern without ministers.

Thus the recluse may rest in obscurity without care, but the ruler cannot rest in solitude and find order.

Therefore Fu Yue and Lü Shang were never anxious for fame, for virtue complete makes light of titles.

Yet the great rulers Yin Gao and Zhou Wen longed in dreams for worthy men, knowing that to build vast merit requires great assistants."

3.

"The true danger lies in those born within the deep palaces, raised in the hands of women, who know nothing of toil or fear.

They inherit the throne and never learn the weight of rise and fall.

Their concern lies in luxury, their pursuit in pleasure.

They delight in hunting and feasting, they thrill at seductive sounds and dazzling beauty.

Their eyes and ears serve only these two desires.

They judge men not by spirit or virtue but by entertainment and charm.

They know not that rare gems and ivory come walking from ten thousand miles away, yet the instruments that could steady a falling state lie unused within their own borders.

When sickness has taken root, they summon doctors in haste.

When the beam of the hall is already broken, they begin to seek carpenters.

It is as if fire rages and they start to dig a well, or hunger strikes and they begin to measure the fields.

Even common laborers must be trained and guided to use their full strength.

How then can a ruler, without preparation, suddenly know how to use the worthy?”

Chapter 12 - Employing the Capable (任能)

1.

It was said,

“When the tail grows larger than the body, it cannot be moved.

When the minister is more able than the ruler, he cannot be trusted.

One who tries to swallow more than his mouth can hold will surely choke, and one who leans on power not equal to his own will be treated with contempt.”

2.

The Master said,

“Strange indeed is this saying.

In ancient times, when the prince of Jing was still a child, he governed the state with the aid of twenty-five elders, and thus attained peace and order.

When Ziqian rose from humble birth to rule a great land, it was because he gathered men stronger than himself, and welcomed their greater wisdom.

When Duke Huan of Qi killed his brother to seize the throne, his conduct was that of beasts and birds.

He loosened his hair, drank wine from ritual vessels, and kept three hundred women in his chambers.

Yet he entrusted government to Guan Zhong, and thereby became the first of the hegemons.

When Guan Zhong died, disorder swiftly followed.

The state of Lu employed Ji Zi for more than twenty years.

Within, there was no flawed policy, without, no invasion or theft.

But when he died, decline and ruin came at once.

Was it not because their rulers lacked the talent, yet their success was great?

And when they ruled by their own hand, their ruin was complete?”

3.

“When the founder of Han made plans behind the curtain and won battles a thousand miles away, he was not greater than Zhang Liang and Chen Ping.

When he commanded vast armies that triumphed in every field, he was not stronger than Han Xin and Peng Yue.

Yet by using them both, he completed the empire.

To walk swiftly and tire oneself is not as good as riding upon a swift steed.

To chase the flying and the running is not as sure as relying on hawks and hounds.

A strong crossbow is hard to draw, yet it can pierce armor and reach far.

A great ship is hard to steer, yet it can bear heavy loads across deep waters.

A fierce general is difficult to control, yet he can repel enemies and expand the borders.

A wise and lofty minister is hard to approach, yet he can order the rites and steady the realm.”

4.

“In ancient times Duke Ai of Lu was a dull ruler, yet Confucius, the highest of sages, did not dare to neglect his duty.

Duke Jing of Qi was of low talent, yet Yan Ying, a great minister, did not fail to serve with all his heart.

Should a servant compare his wisdom with that of his lord, or measure strength between himself and his ruler?

Must one serve only Yao or Shun before he will act as a minister?

What duty is not the ruler’s? What service is not for the people?

To feel shame that one’s lord does not match Tang or Yu.

That, too, is the heart of a truly enlightened man.”

Chapter 13 - Revering the Worthy (欽士)

1.

The Master said,

“When You Yu served in the land of Rong, the Duke Mu of Qin feared losing him.

When Chu slew De Chen, Duke Wen of Jin rejoiced.

When Le Yi departed, Yan fell.

When Wen Zhong and Fan Li arrived, Yue rose to supremacy.

To lose a worthy man is to bring ruin upon the state.

It is not merely that having them brings weight and lacking them brings loss.

Even the tomb of Liu Hui could blunt the blades of enemies.

How much more powerful is the man who sits at court?

Even the hermit of Ganmu Forest could turn away invading armies.

How much more the one placed beside the throne?

The image of Zhi Du made fierce tribes tremble.

The corpse of Kongming made great states lay down their arms.

With such men defending the realm, the land will never be invaded.

With such men leading the army, the ruler will never be shamed.”

2.

“Therefore the enlightened ruler sends bundles of silk to humble cottages.

He raises banners for scholars dwelling in poor forests.

He sends carriages across rivers to welcome them.

He opens the four gates and grows not weary.

He does not begrudge treasure or distance or humility of words.

He makes the seeking of the worthy his highest task, and the gaining of men his greatest treasure.

He who recommends a worthy man receives the highest reward.

He who conceals one is guilty of stealing his place."

3.

"Thus Duke Zhou carried gifts to a white-walled cottage.

The Duke of Qin knelt before the scholar Zhang Sheng.

When Zou Yan crossed his border, the lord of Yan swept the road with a broom.

When Zhuang Zhou was in hunger, King Hui of Zhao rose to greet him.

When Duke Ping of Jin met Hai Tang, though stricken with gout, he sat upright in respect.

When the lord of Qi visited Ji Qiu, though the journey was long, he never wearied of going.

When the King of Chu received correction from Bao Shen, he endured the lash.

When Jian laid down his armor before Gong Lu, he accepted rebuke.

Though these kings humbled their rank and bowed before the lowly, in the end they opened their eyes to greater light and lent their ears to farther sound.

Thus their realms shone bright and their power stood firm, like dragons soaring and tigers crouching in their strength."

Chapter 14 - On the Use of Punishment (用刑)

1.

The Master said,

“All men praise benevolence, yet none can govern purely by benevolence alone.

All men despise punishment, yet none can bring order by abolishing it.

Some say, ‘When an enlightened ruler governs, virtue spreads and the people bend like grass before the wind. When the Way is fulfilled and harmony prevails, what need is there for punishment?’

But I say, virtue and teaching are like the embroidered robes of ceremony, while law and punishment are like the armor that guards against blades.

To use virtue alone to control the violent is like facing sharpened swords with silk and embroidery.

To employ punishment in a time of peace is like wearing armor in the ancestral hall.

Benevolence is the instrument that nurtures, and punishment is the tool that restrains.

I wish to benefit others, yet there are those who wish to harm.

Kindness alone cannot reform them, only law can stop them.

Thus punishment is the ally of benevolence, and by this its necessity is known.”

2.

“To nurture life by preserving the inner breath, by breathing and exhaling, gazing inward and stretching like the bear or the bird, these are methods of long life.

Yet they are difficult and slow, and of those who attempt them, one in ten thousand succeed.

When illness is grave and pain severe, when the body is failing and life near its end, one must pierce with needles or apply strong medicine.

If one abandons the doctor's cures to seek the way of the immortals, death will be many.

Thus in government, benevolence is not without beauty.

But the common people are cunning and deceitful, they pursue gain and forget righteousness.

If they are not corrected by authority and restrained by law, then to dream of the age of Fuxi and Shennong is folly.

To end killing by killing, this is not joy, it is necessity."

3.

"When the Eight Trigrams were established to exhaust principle and perfect nature, they already recorded the use of punishment.

In the hexagram 'Biting Through' it says, 'Punishment brings clarity to justice,' and in 'The Abysmal' it speaks of ropes and cords.

Thus the use of law is ancient.

Even the Yellow Emperor, whose virtue was highest, led armies through a hundred battles.

At Zhuolu and Banquan corpses filled the field and rivers ran with blood, yet rebellion still arose.

If even he could not make all men good, how could any age exist without punishment?

In the height of Tang and Yu, though harmony ruled, exile and execution still existed, and only then did all under Heaven submit.

Emperor Wen of Han was quiet and gentle, yet he still sentenced four hundred to death, and many were flogged.

The craftsman never abandons his rule and compass, and thus no beam is crooked.

The wise ruler never abandons law and penalty, and thus his order does not decay."

4.

"The Way of Heaven and Earth cannot be purely gentle.

Spring gives warmth and growth, but autumn brings chill and death.

When the winds of spring rise, all things flourish, and when the white dew falls, the blossoms fade.

Thus nature completes its work.

If warmth came without cold, worms would never sleep and trees would never shed.

If leniency came without severity, wickedness would grow and weapons would never rest.

To preserve rightness there must be reward, and to restrain evil there must be punishment.

Reward and punishment are the two great levers of order.

The wise ruler balances compassion and sternness, so that the timid cannot grow insolent and the bold do not harm the kind.

Among the five punishments there are three thousand crimes; the cord of law cannot be bent.

If the minister of justice ceases to act, the ruler himself is at fault.

When law is softened, deceit begins; when law is neglected, rebellion grows."

5.

“The ruin of states does not come from lack of law, but from laws too many to enforce.

The defeat of armies does not come from lack of prohibitions, but from commands that go unheeded.

Thus corruption spreads and the lower defy the higher.

Reward should fit the merit, not depend on its size; punishment should match the crime, not depend on its cruelty.

If flogging is abolished in the household, servants grow lazy; if war ceases in the realm, the people lose respect.

Love must be guided by reverence, and so rites are established.

Virtue must be upheld by awe, and so law is made.

The craftsman does not cast aside compass and rule, and thus circles and squares do not err.

The enlightened ruler does not discard law and order, and thus trickery finds no place.

Even Tang and Yu, whose virtue reached Heaven, did not pardon the four crimes.

The Duke of Zhou, though kind to his brothers, did not spare the two uncles.

Confucius executed Zheng Mou, and Emperor Wu of Han killed his nephew; they wept for the law, yet could not avoid it.”

6.

“To punish one and awaken ten thousand, to sacrifice the few to preserve the many, is like combing hair to remove knots, where the benefit is greater than the pain.

It is like cutting a sore to save the body.

Cauterizing and piercing are painful, yet they heal disease.

Punishment is ugly and cruel, yet it rescues society.

In armies of ten thousand, not all are brave.

To charge through flame and blade is against human nature.

If one persuades with gentle words, few will offer their lives; if one enforces with firm law, all will fight with courage.

To lead by laughter is slower than to command by fear.

To lure by pleasure is weaker than to govern by justice."

7.

"Therefore some states are secure because their laws are firm, as Wei Zi made strict his prohibitions, and others are safe because their punishments are swift, as the people of Wei cast aside ashes to purify the city.

To forbid pleasure by what men fear, to make severity the means of safety. This is the art of preservation.

The wise physician cures disease before it arises; the true ruler halts rebellion before it begins.

But if one uses light punishment to forbid great crimes, or weak laws to protect great wealth, the more rules are written, the more they are broken.

It is like digging a pit in the road and calling it safety; such false kindness is not the way of the humane."

8.

"The wise ruler begins with himself to guide others, he disciplines his kin to instruct the distant.

He does not bend the law to favor his will, and he pardons no man without cause.

As in the past, Shi Kuang executed his own kin to uphold justice, and Duke Wen of Jin overcame his pity to strike his servant Jie.

Thus benevolence is the fragrance of governance, but punishment is its bridle and bit.

Fragrance may be pleasing but is not essential, while the reins must never be cast aside.

If respect slackens for a moment, arrogance arises.

If awe weakens for a day, corruption begins.

When one should be angry yet is not, the traitor becomes a tiger.

When one should kill yet spares, the great thief is born.

Water erodes the banks slowly, yet mountains crumble.

A tree of a thousand spans begins from a hair-thin root.

A fire kindled by friction can be quenched with a cup, yet once it spreads it consumes the plains.

A bird's egg may be crushed in the hand, yet when the phoenix soars into the dawn, even the brave cannot subdue it."

9.

"The enlightened ruler corrects evils while they are small, and removes dangers while they are still hidden.

He does not boast of virtue while disorder grows, nor hesitate to act when punishment is due.

Punishment is the sacred instrument of the state, the sword held in the ruler's own hand.

It must not be delegated to others, just as a long blade cannot be grasped by the point, nor a great fish drawn from the deep.

In this lies the root of rise and fall, the source of safety and peril.

Tian Chang seized Qi, the six ministers divided Jin, Zhao Gao murdered the house of Qin, and Wang Mang usurped Han.

Frost gathers into ice, and calamity grows by degrees.

Some sighed by the sea and struck their hearts at Shanglin Terrace. Their lineage destroyed, their altars extinguished.

All these men sought empty praise from the ancients and forgot the real dangers of their own time."

10.

Some have said,

"Punishment arose only in the latter ages.

The true way to govern lies only in benevolence and righteousness.

If I am pure and still, the people will naturally become upright.

If I am without desire, the people will become simple.

When cooking fish, do not stir too much.

Rule with love and the people will gather.

Lead with joy and the people will obey.

Thus Mencius said that peace lies in embodying benevolence, and Yangzi declared that the doctrines of Shen and Han are those of butchers.

To tighten the reins and sharpen the whip is not the art of Zaofu's chariot.

Harsh punishments and severe laws are not the way of the Three Augusts and Five Emperors.

The sage of Yu commanded without pointing and ruled without speaking.

He sat facing south, and harmony prevailed.

Confucius governed through music and poetry, remaining within the hall, and even the fishermen trembled in reverence."

11.

"But only when one is generous in reward and light in tax, rescuing the poor and lifting the fallen, promoting the worthy and employing the able, encouraging the farmer and limiting excess, welcoming the guest with propriety and pacifying the distant with virtue, teaching through schools and nurturing through music. Only then does moral transformation rise like grass before the wind, and the hearts of men are cleansed like dust in clear water.

When the court is filled with rulers of virtue and humility, and the countryside free of those who break propriety, then the land may lie untilled and yet be secure, and the bell of Chu may hang forever unstruck.

Why then must reward and punishment be needed to govern?"

12.

The Master said,

"The Book of Changes says, 'Clarify punishment and make the law firm.'

The Book of History says, 'Judge with compassion but maintain justice.'

From the beginning, men have been rewarded in the court and punished in the marketplace.

This did not begin in the latter age.

If benevolence is too abundant, law cannot stand.

If authority is too weak, the lower will overtake the higher.

When law fails, all affairs fall into confusion.

When inferiors rise against superiors, rebellion is clear.

Purity has been diluted since the Three Dynasties, and simplicity scattered since Qin and Han.

The Way is weakened, and the customs of our time are thin.

To think that by knots of cord one can restrain deceit, or by silence reform cunning men, is like steering a galloping horse without reins, or sailing the sea in a hollow log without oar or rudder.

Would one bow and yield to quench the fire of rebellion, or dance with halberds to calm the Red Eyebrows?

Surely such a way cannot succeed."

13.

"From the Three Augusts to the Five Emperors, the world moved ever faster, and from the Kings and Hegemons it raced yet more.

In the times of decay, officials deceived, the people grew sly, and robbers walked the markets.

Flogging and branding could not shame them, and extermination of clans could not stop ambition.

So rulers strained their eyes to see farther and sharpened their ears to hear wider.

They lit torches to expose deceit, and broke their hearts to end corruption.

Yet still the marketplace echoed with cries of injustice, and the borders groaned with wrongs unheard."

14.

“Those who bring ruin to the state often arise beneath the ruler’s very gaze, and those who destroy nations often dwell within his own walls.

To try to rule a corrupt age by the way of the High Sovereign, or to calm rebellion with the songs of harmony, is to forget the changes of time and the balance of gain and loss.

It is like carving a mark on a boat to seek a lost sword, or aiming at the heavens while shooting five paces ahead.

It is like wearing armor to swim the deep, or holding winter furs to endure summer heat.

It is like scratching one’s back by bending the neck, or curing frostbite by holding ice.

Of all follies, none is greater.”

15.

“The ruler must first command before he punishes, and when he punishes he must not rejoice.

Let the noble have no grievance in losing his fief, and the humble know shame and cease from strife.

But if the strong hide their faces and the cruel go unfeared, if indulgence shelters the corrupt and softness spares the wicked, it is like one dying of thirst pointing to the sea beyond a thousand miles, or one drowning who begins to build a boat.

When the flood has already reached the roof, and the fire burns the forest, even the wise and brave cannot escape.

Such men will suffer the fate of Kuafu who chased the sun, and perish in their own folly.”

16.

“The world often mocks the realism of Shen Buhai and Han Fei, and praises the lofty speech of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

Yet in governing, none can succeed by abolishing punishment.

To pardon the murderer and forgive the violent is like offering half a meal to one starving. It cannot save him.

The sayings of the Daoists are lofty indeed, but their use in government is flawed, distant, and impractical.

It is as if one tried to sew with the sword of Ganjiang, or to make a mouse carry an elephant.

A golden boat cannot cross the wild waves, nor can a jade horse run a thousand miles.”

17.

“If one truly followed their words, one would burn the fetters and destroy the prisons, dismiss the officials of justice, erase the criminal codes, melt the weapons, level the walls of cities, scatter the treasuries, and break the seals of rank.

The bridges and barriers would be gone, the scales and measures cast aside.

We would blind the sharp eyes of Lǐ Zhū and deafen the keen ears of Zǐ Yě.

All would drift in aimless freedom, following the herds of Heaven.

Untrained, ungoverned, forgetting one another like fishes in the lake.

The court would be empty as if none ruled, and the people would die without knowing one another’s names.

It is easy to speak of, but impossible to live by.”

18.

“The vulgar scholars have merely heard that the Zhou dynasty rose through benevolence and that Qin perished through severity, yet they do not see that Zhou’s success was not from pure gentleness, nor Qin’s fall from mere harshness.”

19.

“In ancient Zhou, punishments cut the nose and severed the feet.

At the oath of Mengjin it was decreed that those who arrived late would be executed, and rewards and punishments were firmly declared.

By such means they ruled, yet this was not pure benevolence.

In later generations, law decayed and ritual replaced justice.

Rulers became cruel and petty, their commands confined to the palace, and the rites and wars were no longer their own.

Ministers fought for power, the state became a long serpent devouring itself.

Some drowned in rivers, others were exiled to the borders.

Their downfall came not from too much law, but from law abandoned.”

20.

“When Qin first rose, officials were chosen for talent.

Shang Yang and You Yu established laws within; Bai Qi and Wang Jian conquered beyond.

They struck the weak and devoured the foolish, subdued rivals and ruled as emperors.

Their victories and expansion were due to clear reward and certain punishment.

Yet in later generations, arrogance followed success.

They became extravagant and cruel.

Walls rose for ten thousand li, palaces filled the land, bells, drums, and dancers abounded.

At Lishan, the conscripts were half the nation, at the frontier, the soldiers filled every home.

They burned books and buried scholars, waged war north and south, and forced countless into labor.

Families were torn apart, the people starved and wailed.

The dead covered the fields like mountains, and the living wept without end.

Xu Fu fled with false promises, Zhao Gao gathered his pack of wolves.

Rebellion arose and ten houses fell for every one that stood.

Was Qin's fall because of strict law? No, Qin gained through firmness, and perished through cruelty."

21.

"Punishment is like a blade.

In the hands of the skilled, it brings order and safety; in the hands of the clumsy, it wounds the innocent.

When a ruler governs with the Way and strengthens it with law, deceit will not arise and evil will turn back.

But if the net of justice is torn and the cords of law are loose, Heaven itself will be angered.

To use punishment without reason brings swift disaster.

Just as water and fire can both save and destroy, so it is with the law. All depends on who wields it."

22.

"If illness remains and one neglects the physician's art, long life cannot be hoped for.

If corruption spreads and the laws are not severe, no age can long endure.

Therefore the ruler must employ men of order like Zhang Tang to uphold the statutes, and appoint those like Zhao and Chen to examine and correct.

When the ruler keeps his mind attentive above, and loyal ministers exhaust their strength below, when evil is struck like the hawk seizing the sparrow, and disorder cut like the sickle through weeds, when reward is never misplaced and punishment never unjust, then peace will surely follow.

When laws are obeyed without fear, perhaps one day punishment may rest. But not yet."

23.

Someone asked,

"If punishment truly aids virtue and promotes goodness, how can its use ever be excessive?

Should the ancient corporal punishments then be restored?"

24.

The Master replied,

"Why should they not?

In ancient Zhou, corporal punishment endured for seven hundred years, yet the dynasty remained strong.

When the Han abolished them, its generations were fewer.

Now the lash replaces the knife, yet more men die.

Outwardly it seems lenient, but inwardly it kills.

Those guilty of crimes not deserving death receive only beating or exile.

If amnesty is granted, they return unscarred, their bodies whole and unashamed.

They cut their hair and strike their backs, but such pains do not restrain those near to murder.

When corporal punishment was removed, the middle path between life and death was lost.

Thus those guilty of lesser crimes are punished too lightly, and their numbers increase.

To abolish bodily penalties is to leave half the wicked uncorrected."

25.

"If not for rebels, traitors, and soldiers who betray their commanders, if not for murderers and those who kill with their own hands, then corporal punishment could replace execution.

It would deter evil men, yet spare their lives.

They would still labor for the state, their line would not be extinguished, and their mutilation would stand as warning to all.

When the people see such punishment, their hearts grow cold, and crime diminishes.

To kill is heavy indeed, yet the corpse is soon buried and forgotten.

The shame of mutilation, however, endures and its lesson reaches farther."

26.

"In the age of Wei, this matter was often debated.

The great scholars and men of understanding agreed that corporal punishment should be restored, though others opposed them and no accord was reached.

Emperor Wu of Wei also held this view, yet he said, 'The borders are not yet at peace, and the distant tribes cannot comprehend the truth.

If they heard that China cuts off noses and feet, they would call us cruel.

Let us therefore wait until the four corners are secure.'

The learned Yang Xiong also said that corporal punishment should be revived, but since it has long been abolished, men who sit and speak of the Way do not consider it urgent."

Chapter 15 - On the Careful Selection of Officials (審舉)

1.

The Master said,

“Mount Hua and Mount Huo rise to the height of Heaven because their foundations are deep.

Tang and Yu reached their mighty achievements because they relied on able ministers.

Even if one had the hand of Sun Yang, without the legs of a fine horse he could not reach a thousand li.

Even if one had the wisdom of antiquity, without assistants to carry it out, he could not accomplish great works.

Though the ruler’s sight is as bright as the sun and moon, his spirit cannot see all.

The myriad affairs of the world cannot be ruled by one alone.

The smallest details cannot be personally known.

Therefore he must borrow eyes to see afar, and ears to hear wide.

Thus he must appoint officers who aid and uphold him.”

2.

“The sage ruler always begins by seeking the worthy.

He regards the discovery of talent as his foremost task.

He sends jade and silk to the cottages of the hills, and drives swift chariots to the wild valleys.

He toils in seeking men, yet rests in using them.

From nobles to commoners, all have their place and duty.

By holding himself humble and still, he governs without effort, and peace prevails without punishment.

His virtue spreads everywhere, and the world is at ease.

Appointing offices and dividing duties is like building a house; if one beam is unfit, collapse begins there.

In ancient times, candidates were judged by four virtues and nine classes, and only the brightest and most upright were chosen.

But in the later Han, under Emperors Huan and Ling, power left the throne and entered the hands of corrupt men.

The net of justice broke, the wind of virtue faded.

Honesty was suppressed and flattery exalted.

Those who followed the Way were dismissed, and those with wealth advanced.

Striving for profit became custom, shame was forgotten.

Some bribed with treasures, some sold letters of recommendation.

Some entered by noble family, others by kneeling and flattery.

Thus corruption spread and decay took root.”

3.

“When the scales of judgment are unbalanced, weight and measure are confused.

When the cords of rule are not stretched, straight and crooked are not divided.

When the standard leans, impurity multiplies.

If such men govern, they become cruel and greedy.

They gather wealth to repay the price of their offices.

Placed in the court, they bring chaos like tangled threads.

They raise the base and call them allies, and hope that the realm will be well, as if one hung pebbles expecting them to shine, or sought pure tones from broken strings.

Therefore one must cleanse the murky and raise the worthy, test candidates strictly, and guard against the greedy.

To neglect this is to invite ruin and sorrow.”

4.

“In ancient times, the feudal lords who presented worthy men were rewarded if their nominees succeeded, and punished if they failed.

Yet even then the poets sang of gluttonous nobles who ate without labor, and woodsmen lamented that the virtuous were ignored.

How much more must we guard today, when choosing the unworthy brings danger, and appointing the wrong man harms the state.

If the measure of worth once errs, all else cannot be set right.

The solitary and capable often hide their talents, waiting for one who will value them, while the petty and shallow rush forward by cunning.

The patient are neglected, the hasty exalted.”

5.

“When owls fill the sky, the phoenix hides.

When wolves block the path, the unicorn flees.

If goodness is promoted, evil departs.

If deceit is honored, heroes withdraw.

The noble disdain to walk with the base, and the pure are ashamed to mix with the greedy.

When appointment and merit are both wrong, the worthy close their mouths.

When the worthy fall silent, villains unite.

When villains unite, the petty grow strong.

When the petty grow strong, monsters walk side by side.

Thus songs of praise cease, and cries of lament fill the land.”

6.

“The great and talented, confident in their virtue, accept fate with calm, letting fortune or failure rest with Heaven.

Thus they often fall behind factions of power and wealth.

The upright who move only by propriety are like mountains deep and waters still; few recognize them.

The ambitious obscure and slander them, so that even rulers who seek the wise cannot find them.

Those who hold the Way wish to serve, yet have no path.

Though they possess the virtue of Yao and the vision of Yu, they die unrecognized.

Meanwhile those with party and influence swarm together, many and loud.

Positions are few and seekers are many, so the powerful seize the posts while the worthy remain hidden.”

7.

“In the reigns of Ling and Xian, the eunuchs held power, and treacherous ministers ruled.

The wicked destroyed the loyal.

At court, offices were filled by deceit, and in the provinces, candidates were chosen lightly.

When selection fails above, governors are unfit below.

When recommendation fails below, the worthy are never raised.

Thus people said, ‘Those nominated as men of learning do not know the books.

Those praised for filial piety live apart from their fathers.

The poor and honest are sullied like mud, while the wealthy and noble are cowardly as hens.’

And they also said, ‘In olden days men studied to serve; now they seek office to avoid labor.’

Such was the sickness of that age.”

8.

“At that time, offices were openly sold as in a marketplace.

Those who crossed the river to buy rank were like merchants haggling for goods.

The one with much gold gained high office, the one with little remained low.

Thus the Treasury of the Eastern Park overflowed with the price of rank, and men mocked Cui Lie for the stink of copper.

The rulers above set the example, the ministers below followed.

Flatterers alone were favored, and the corrupt prospered.

Clerks and officials became brokers of power, each demanding a price.

How could a poor and upright man hope for appointment?

Moreover, the wicked and upright are as fire and ice.

The corrupt hate the honest, the deceitful fear the sincere.

Those who gained office by crooked means feared criticism, so they slandered the righteous and entangled the pure in false charges.

Thus no one dared to defend the virtuous."

9.

"So it was that Zeng and Min suffered slander like traitors, and Confucius and Mozi were defamed by thieves and rogues.

The upright and steadfast were trampled in the mire, while the cunning and deceitful rose like rainbows.

The foolish and shallow could not distinguish right from wrong.

They called the steadfast inflexible, and praised the cunning as wise.

Thus the people followed the current and drifted with the tide, abandoning virtue and diligence, seeking only profit and favor.

This was the reason the Han declined, and a warning for the ages to come."

10.

Someone asked,

"You have spoken well of the failings of late Han selection.

If we wish to correct those errors and avoid their ruin, how shall we change the tune of our age?

How shall we make the crooked straight again?

If a man is handsome and dignified but empty of substance, and another plain but full of worth, how can we discern them?

To judge too quickly risks error, but to delay too long hinders use.

What is to be done?”

11.

The Master replied,

“To know men truly is wisdom, and even the sages found it hard.

If every governor could discern talent before appointment and preserve integrity throughout, it would not be easy.

Yet if they abandon private favor and open their minds, if they are unmoved by greed and unmoved by recommendation, and if they test with care and inquire widely, if they examine name and deed and compare words and actions, then they can find truth.

Let relatives attest his filial piety, and his village testify to his honesty.

If he has served in small posts, observe his diligence and purity.

A short thread shows the weaver’s skill, a hunt of a mouse shows the warrior’s courage.”

12.

The Master said,

“Let the testing of candidates for scholarship and virtue remain as before.

Examine their mastery of the classics and their written responses.

Guard against deceit in their answers, and reject those who fail completely.

Officials who falsify or endorse the unworthy must be punished.

If the candidate’s writings are false or unfit, the governor and inspector who recommended him shall be dismissed.

If some pass and some fail, promotions shall be based on the ratio of their truth.

Those who accept bribes and raise the unworthy, once proven, shall lose their rank and be barred from office for life, never pardoned by amnesty.

The nominee and his recommender shall share the same punishment.

If such laws are applied for even a year or two, many who once sought false fame will no longer dare.

Then men will turn again to virtue and learning, and the standards of selection will be restored."

13.

"Furthermore, all who hold office and commit public crimes shall be punished according to law.

Those guilty of corruption or bribery, though not deserving death, shall be barred from service for life, or for twenty years if the offense be light.

Thus dishonest officials will change their hearts and become pure like Yi Yin and Bo Yi.

If those who take bribes are merely dismissed and soon restored, their greed will grow like weeds.

Then even the worthiest candidates will be lost under corrupt superiors."

14.

Someone asked,

"Eloquence does not always mean ability.

If a man passes the written tests, how can we be sure he can govern?"

15.

The Master said,

“In ancient times men were chosen by skill in archery. Shall we then doubt the value of learning?

If we abandon the testing of classics, what better method remains?

Rich grass does not grow on barren soil, and great fish do not live in shallow water.

Words of wisdom do not come from foolish lips, nor fine writings from dull hands.

When we read the Hongfan, we know that Ji Zi possessed the art of statecraft.

From the Nine Strategies, we see that Fan Li planned for the realm.

From the writings of Guan Zhong, we know he could bring order from chaos.

From the works of Wu Zixu, we see the power of kingship and law.

Thus, when a candidate of filial virtue can expound the scriptures without error, and a scholar can answer questions with clarity, then deceit cannot hide.

Even great generals of high rank are tested by written command before battle. How much more should scholars be?

Testing may not always bring the perfect man, but it is far better than having no test at all.”

16.

“Let all men who hope for office study diligently.

Even this alone would greatly restore the customs of learning.

When all fear the shame of false nomination, and cease from chasing fortune, when they abandon the rush for favor and return to true study, then the Way of the scholars will rise again.

Bribery will fade, talent will be found, and the offices of the land will no longer stand empty."

17.

Someone said,

"Your methods are too strict.

To bar a man from office for life is heavy indeed.

Such harsh laws inspire fear, not virtue.

Tight reins and sharp whips were never used by Bole.

Rigid laws and severe codes are a disgrace to benevolent rule."

18.

The Master said,

"Medicine that fills the bones and nourishes life cannot cure the wound of today's sword.

A mild and tolerant policy may suit an age of innocence, but it cannot heal an age of decay.

When wolves and tigers press at the gate, one must grasp the sword, not play the lute.

When fire burns within the house, one must pour water, not bow and speak softly.

To reason of mercy with those who sell offices is to argue theft with the bandit Zhi.

Gentleness cannot save what has already burned."

19.

“The world today is one realm, united beneath Heaven.

Therefore its laws must also be one.

Even small weights and measures cannot differ by region; how then can the standard for men differ without chaos?

Though the southern lands lie far by the sea, they have long followed our rites and teachings.

Though once briefly divided, it was for less than a century.

The study of the sages was never lost there.

Their land is smaller than the central states, so their numbers are fewer, yet among them are men of virtue no less than in the north.

The disciples of Ziyou and Zhongren were not beneath those of Lu and Qi.”

20.

“When the Wu lands first submitted, their scholars were excused from the tests.

Now peace has endured forty years, yet still they are not examined.

Thus the culture of the southeast declines from former days.

To treat them thus is like calling them barbarians of left-sleeved robes.

This is not the way of a ruler who loves his children.

A law that invites harm or a command that lessens virtue must be changed.

If candidates need not be tested, they will adorn themselves and boast, competing for hollow fame.

Who then will open a book again?

To indulge such ease is to destroy what one hopes to preserve.”

21.

“There are indeed a few whose nature loves learning, who study not for profit but for joy, such as Fa Gaoqing and Zhou Shenglie.

But those who study without hope of gain are one among ten thousand.

Most, like Ning Yue or Huang Ba, were driven to diligence by hardship, seeking to rise by learning.

Without an age like Emperor Wu’s, even Zhu Maichen and Yan Zhu would not have read the classics.

If an easier path to wealth exists, and no natural love of study restrains them, who would toil in poverty to learn, sweeping the floors of teachers or traveling far to seek the Way?”

22.

“In times of war, arms were honored and letters despised.

The vulgar treated scholars as servants, and the classics as dust.

Why was this so? Because fame no longer favored the learned.

To neglect scholars is like selling fine hats among barbarians, or showing strange beasts to those who have no use for them.

If examinations are restored in every province, then students will again travel a thousand li to seek teachers.

They will trade bribes for books, and their houses will echo with study before the day is done.”

23.

The Master said,

“Those of true talent and learning are few indeed.

Even if in our time, unlike the corrupt age of Huan and Ling, an official is chosen without bribery, how can the scholar of pure study be sure to pass?

Though he has mastered the classics and answers all with precision, false accusations may still prevent his rise.

Thus I lament that those in charge of selection fail to build proper safeguards.”

24.

“My thought is this:

When the new year’s examinations approach, let the officials and scholars prepare the questions in advance, sufficient in number for use.

Seal them in the palace so that none may alter them.

On the day of testing, assign each candidate a prompt at once.

Gather all examinees in one hall, with high ministers to observe.

Forbid all contact and speech until the test is done.

Those who break this shall have no pardon.

A wise ruler relies not on others’ honesty, but on systems that prevent deceit.

To set strict rules is not shameful.

When examinations are truly established, schools will scarcely be needed, for all men will study willingly.”

25.

“In ancient times the four categories of officials included experts in law and decree.

Now, those who govern, high or low, scarcely know the statutes.

Subtle words confuse them, petty clerks are ignorant, yet they judge life and death and treat the people's fate lightly.

Superiors who do not understand the law are deceived by those below, and judgments are written by the foolish.

Some decide by whim, without regard for rule.

Therefore, select upright men who understand the law, and test them as you test the classics.

Assign rank by skill and use accordingly.

Then the empire will have few who twist the law or err in judgment."

Chapter 16 - On Social Relations and Friendship (交際)

1.

The Master said,

“In friendship, one must not be shallow or mixed with pretense.

To show the face without sharing the heart is what Yang Xiong reproached.

Therefore, though a man’s rank may be high and his name glorious, though he be my equal in age and station, if his pursuits differ, if his aims and values are unlike my own, I do not form a bond with him.

Some boast of early success and look down upon others, some neglect old friends who have fallen behind, some despise those of humble gate or different taste, some judge a man by his office and not by his virtue.

Thus the truly gifted, though noble in mind and pure in conduct, may die unknown, while those of shallow ability who by chance find favor rise high.

Such people can make worms fly and make sparrows claim the heavens, they speak with the voice of power and bring fortune or ruin by a word.

When they prosper, they shine like flowers in frost; when they fail, they wither though spring has come.

I would rather hold my tongue and keep my back straight, ashamed to share the same world with them.”

2.

“Fortune and failure cannot be forced.

Yet the light and frivolous, the petty sons without merit, spend their nights and days waiting at others' gates, bowing and flattering, bearing gifts and words of praise, seeking favor by every means.

They labor for months or years yet are still rejected, and so they beg the great to recommend them.

If received, they rejoice as a prisoner freed from chains; if refused, they grieve as one struck by illness.

They do not understand that success and failure are governed by fate, that the Way honors uprightness, and that times of ease and hardship are entrusted to Heaven.

Alas for such small men, how shallow they are!

Human hearts differ so greatly that I cannot but sigh and feel pity for them."

3.

"In ancient days, Zhuangzi saw Hui Zi followed by many carriages, and he cast away his own fish bait, despising those who pursued worldly honors.

So too do I lament that men today hurry to attach themselves to the powerful, striving for patronage instead of cultivating virtue.

They do not labor to build true merit, nor to improve themselves.

They seek only high connections and noble friends, thinking this the greatest art of life and the surest road to success.

Those who stand alone with integrity are called stubborn and proud;

those who bow and flatter are called wise in the ways of the world.

Thus the custom has turned upside down, and all chase the shadow, forgetting the root.

This is cause for sorrow."

4.

“Some men have little virtue but high position, their minds swollen with pride.

At the mention of profit they tremble; when they meet a wise man, they fall asleep.

If a scholar comes dressed in coarse cloth and carrying books, though his words be brilliant and his learning deep, they treat him like dust.

But if the sons of lords and princes, arrayed in silk and bearing gems, come to call, though they cannot even distinguish grain from beans. The door is opened wide and they are greeted with bowed head and clasped hands.

Such are the measures of the age.”

5.

“I regret only that I hold no office to purge this filth from the realm.

Though such men shine bright and wield power enough to move mountains, though a word from them can make a clay idol ascend to Heaven, I have no wish to visit their gates.

Many abase themselves before such people, crawling on their knees, seeking gain from association.

How pitiful! The hearts of men are unequal indeed. What a distance between the noble and the base!

Thus I live in a blessed age yet remain obscure and poor.

The faces once behind me are now far ahead, but I cannot change what I am.

Each man follows his nature; to live or die by it, I cannot do otherwise.”

6.

Someone said,

“The times have changed.

Fame comes from others, not from oneself.

Gold must ride the ship that carries it, the sacred bird must borrow the wind to fly.

Even the fragrant orchid needs the breeze to spread its scent.

A hidden scholar in the hills needs a patron to be known.

Now you, sir, choose only friends pure of conduct and careful of heart, standing alone, refusing to mingle with those of your rank.

You offend the age, make enemies of all, and invite resentment.

Is this the way of blending light with dust, of following the higher harmony?

If friendship must equal wisdom, would Duke Zhou ever have lowered himself to meet men of the cottage?

If friendship must match talent, how could Confucius have accepted any disciples?”

7.

The Master said,

“I have heard that those who choose friends carefully never regret, but those who befriend all lightly often repent.

The wise first discern and then befriend, not first befriend and then discern.

Your argument speaks from worldly advantage; mine rests on the heart of a recluse.

You say that jade floats and birds rise high by cause. This is true, yet not my way.

I would rather be a treasure unshown, a bird that does not soar, a flower whose scent is its own.

To live without faction and without flattery, is this truly less than the bright gem or the fragrant orchid?

Those whose fame exceeds their virtue and whose rank outweighs their talent seldom escape disaster.

How then can friendship with them bring honor or happiness?”

8.

“Thus, to gain favor through such ties is not worth pride, and to suffer loss through rejecting them is no shame.

To lean on the rotten tree is to fall with it; to rest under the crumbling wall is to be buried beneath it.

They cannot preserve themselves from ruin, how could they save me?

A true man who finds contentment within and looks beyond externals must sometimes endure the presence of the mediocre, as garments bear fleas or the body grows moles.

Losing them, though they be countless, is like dust blown from Mount Song. No loss at all.”

9.

“True friendship must be built on honesty and learning, to correct faults and complete what is lacking, to speak truth without request and to die without deceit, to keep one accord in all seasons.

But such friends are rare.

Some differ in word and silence, others in love and hate, some are warm in prosperity but cold in decline, some forget faith for profit.

Thus most friendships are like fish and birds sharing one cage, or ice and fire in one vessel. How can they last?

Even father and son may differ, as did Zigong and Zilu. Even in ancient times there was strife between the wise and their kin.

How then can men of different hearts stay united long?”

10.

“The vulgar form friendships not by virtue but by profit and name.

They come hot and depart cold.

They see wrongs but do not correct them.

They see folly but do not warn.

When there is gain, they take it all.

When there is danger, they flee alone.

If fortune smiles, they grasp it first.

If peril nears, they sell the other to save themselves.

Such friendships, better to have none.”

11.

“It is not that all men are unfit for friendship, but that true and beneficial ones are few, while those that bring harm are many.

To know others truly is difficult even for a sage.

How then can the short-sighted, eager to gather many friends, hope that all will prove loyal in peril and constant in hardship?

To seek a phoenix in a sparrow’s nest, or jade among the dust, is not easy.

I do not deny that such friends exist, but they are rare indeed.”

12.

“When hearts differ, they cannot unite, just as gold sinks and feathers float, or as fire rises and water falls.

Even the hand of Heaven cannot blend what is opposed.

I am by nature plain and quiet, slow to games or amusements.

I dislike gambling and idle talk, I care nothing for hunting or display, and I detest coarse jesting.

These are the pleasures of our age, and in all of them I abstain, thus my circle is few.

Moreover, I speak frankly and admonish others with honesty.

Few accept the medicine of truth with joy.

When I urge study, they laugh; when I warn against indulgence, they turn away.

Thus, how could I easily find companions?”

13.

“To force what is contrary, to twist oneself to please the crowd, this I cannot bear.

Friendships formed without sincerity cannot endure.

To begin warmly and end in estrangement brings blame to both sides.

Affection breeds closeness, and coldness breeds suspicion. Such is the law of nature.

Therefore one must choose carefully.

To drink once together is easy, to remain true forever is hard.

I fear those who seek many companions but do not value one in truth.”

14.

Someone asked,

“Then should one have no friends at all?”

The Master replied,

“How could that be!

Would a man afraid of water discard all boats?

Would one fearing wounds cast away his tools?

Friendship is an ancient necessity.

Heaven and Earth themselves must mingle, or else the world would cease to live.

If rulers and people do not commune, the state will perish.

Friendship begins easily but ends with difficulty.

The fault lies in choosing the wrong person, or in quarreling over small things and forgetting the great.

The Book of Changes praises many friends; the Book of Songs celebrates the joy of comradeship.

Even brothers are not equal to true friends.

The wise always cherish the three beneficial friendships, with the upright, the sincere, and the learned.

Through them, harmony is strengthened, evil words are stilled.

It was through friendship that Guan Zhong escaped death and made his lord hegemon;

through friendship that Ziyuan left the pavilion and rode in the chariot of the honored.

Thus friendship is a mighty power indeed.”

15.

“A single string cannot produce the harmony of Shao or Xia, one color alone cannot form the splendor of the dragon robe.

One flavor cannot fill the sacred cauldron, nor one tree form the vast forest.

Heavenly gardens reach the sky because of many stones piled.

The southern ocean is vast because of countless streams.

When the mirror is raised, the crooked hat is seen.

When the sun shines, the shadow’s curve is known.

When friends of virtue gather, the Way of benevolence is completed.”

16.

“The wise understand this.

They seek friendship with those higher in virtue, and union with those equal in heart.

Together they discuss the Way and advance in virtue.

In calm times they labor for order, in danger they aid one another.

In peace they refine the meaning of truth, in trouble they share compassion.

Thus no man may claim the sole virtue of sincerity, nor another the sole glory of achievement.

For this reason the Way of friendship is precious.”

17.

“Yet it is never easy.

Wealth and power breed betrayal; envy corrodes even the firmest bond.

Old loyalties are forgotten, and bitterness grows where friendship once bloomed.

Thus the noble friendship of Yuan Bo and Ju Qing is remembered only from ancient times, while the betrayal of Zhang Er and Chen Yu repeats itself again and again.

Can one not sigh at this?

The phoenix does not perch with owls, nor the qilin run with wolves, nor the clear spring mix with the muddy stream.

So too, the wise cannot dwell long with the corrupt, for slow stain bends the straight, and pressure breeds harm."

18.

Someone asked,

"Can you tell me the way of perfect friendship?"

The Master said,

"When a true man severs ties, he still speaks no ill.

When he pledges himself to a friend, he would die rather than break faith.

He is familiar without rudeness, gentle without flattery.

If he sees a friend err, he corrects him with honest face.

If reproved himself, he accepts and amends without resentment.

He does not remain silent to avoid offense, nor reject counsel that wounds his pride.

He does not disguise wrong with clever speech, nor cover faults with flowery words.

He does not feign harmony while hiding hatred, nor smile outwardly while despising within.

He does not envy his friend’s success, but shields his faults and praises his strengths.

He quarrels not over trifles, nor harbors jealousy in his heart.

Such friendship fulfills the joy of the Ode of the Deer Cry and silences the lament of Felling the Trees.

But to form bonds lightly and break them easily, to turn love to hatred, is to plant regret without end.”

19.

“In the last days of Han, the empire declined, the reins of Heaven grew slack, and the righteous path was lost.

To withdraw from the world was called purity, to serve it was called shame.

Ranks and rites collapsed, great principles were undone.

Officials sought fame over duty, and the false were praised while the faithful were forgotten.

Men raced through cold and heat to the gates of power, trading flattery for position, buying rank with gold.

They competed for favor and destroyed one another in pursuit of gain.”

20.

“At that time, Gongshu Weichang was sickened by such corruption.

Unable to correct it, unwilling to witness it, he shut his doors, wrote his rebukes, and broke all ties.

His anger was born of righteousness, yet he went too far, bending the straight until it snapped.

Such extremity cannot be lasting law.

We should only avoid false companionship and guard against the root of flattery, not parade our purity in rags or starve to protest the banquet of others.

When friendship is wrong, admonish firmly, if still corrupt, then end it.

That is all.

For when the rites of friendship are lost, the bond itself may rightly be severed."

Chapter 17 - On Completeness and Deficiency (備闕)

1.

The Master said,

“The swift stallion may stretch its sinews and outrun its own shadow, yet it cannot tread on ice or cross deep waters.

The fierce tiger may roar like thunder and seize its prey with strength, yet it cannot soar through clouds or fly in the air.

The great swan cannot spread its wings within a cage, nor can the hawk strike its prey beneath a curtain.

Such is the nature of things and so it is with men.

He who can harmonize the powers of yin and yang may not master the hundred arts of writing.

He who can explain the laws of Heaven’s great cycles may not keep order in the small details of daily work.

Each has its limit and place.”

2.

“Hui Zi was a model of the minister’s intellect, yet he could not steer a boat or command the mariners.

Emperor Gao of Han was divine in courage and strength, yet he could not manage estates or keep his ledgers pure.

Han Xin was the greatest of generals, yet he could not till the field or trade to escape hunger and cold.

Zhou Bo upheld the altars of the state, yet he could not answer a case in law or account for the treasury’s grain.

If we reject a man for what he lacks, we lose the use of what he excels in.

If we demand perfection in every small detail, the grand works that save the world will never be done."

3.

"Heaven cannot make its northwest level, nor Earth its southeast high.

The sun and moon cannot shine into the hollow cave, and wind cannot stir the water at the bottom of a well.

Toothpicks cannot move rafters; the feathers of a wren cannot bear the weight of beams.

To strike a bird, a lump of clay may serve where a thousand coins cannot.

To sew a garment, a small needle is more useful than a long sword.

Why then harness an elephant to catch mice, or make the great roc cry at dawn?

Thus Jiang Taigong sold his fish without success until he met Kings Wen and Wu,

and Master Jiang of the Three Sycamores, dull and slow to others, became alone the peerless minister.

Each has its place and its time. One must know where a virtue belongs."

Chapter 18 - On Promoting the Worthy (擢才)

1.

The Master said,

“Ornate writings and beautiful style are not appreciated by the blind, and rare genius is not understood by the shallow.

When sight cannot discern form, the jade of Yu and the coarse cloth of a beggar are of one value.

When judgment cannot distinguish worth, the wise and the foolish seem alike.

What the eye cannot see, the heart cannot love; what the world ignores, the slanderer will wound.

Love and hate, praise and blame, differ across ages.

Times change, customs shift, and value alters.

The jade disk prized by the kings of Xia, worth cities in its day, would sell for scrap in ours.

So too, the hermit once called noble is now dismissed as useless.

The pillar of a sacred age becomes the criminal of a corrupt one, the purity of the ancients is mocked as weakness by the vulgar.”

2.

“The great and lofty in virtue are like deep wells and high walls, their truth cannot be measured by the shallow.

Those near in view cannot comprehend them; the impatient cannot fathom them.

Because they differ from others, they are despised. Because they do not flatter, they are hated.

When they are ignored, none consider it a loss; when they are wounded, many rejoice.

Dust gathers on white jade, sores appear upon flawless skin. Slander echoes together, and the independent are attacked.

Yi Yin was once robbed, Xu You was once defamed.

Unless there is a mirror as bright as the stars, a mind that perceives the subtle, who can wash the mud and find the gem, or dip in the river and lift a pearl?

Even a polished jade may lie unsold in the market, how much more the treasure still hidden in stone!

If even the knocking at the gate of the worthy brings rejection, how much less those who hide in the wilderness?”

3.

“Sun Bin wished to use his secret strategies, yet Sima cut off his feet.

Han Fei sought to govern wisely, yet Li Si destroyed him.

Jia Yi, full of talent and passion for the realm, was pushed aside by men of arms.

Zizheng, loyal and upright, ready to save the state, was ruined by Gongxian.

So the jade-keeper wept blood over his gem, and the scholar Qin Xi smashed his head in rage.

To tell jade from stone is easier than to tell sage from fool.

Those who love gems are punished for their devotion; those who cherish worth are cursed for it.

If even clear gems are doubted and pure treasures defiled, how shall hidden virtue find recognition?

The crooked fear the straight rule, the guilty fear the light.

Thus the good are suppressed, their praises silenced, and slanders rise before truth is seen.

Without a voice like the wailing of Chu, how can such men ever be known?”

4.

“When one mistakes jade for stone, one will soon mistake stone for jade.

When one calls the wise foolish, one will soon call the foolish wise.

Mistaking stone for jade brings no ruin, but exalting fools as sages destroys the state.

The doctor who misreads the pulse kills the patient though he yet lives.

How can one not take care? Alas, how few truly think on this!

Even Confucius, highest of sages, was slandered by the men of Qi and obstructed in Chu.

Even Wen Zhong, great minister, was despised in his early days.

How hard it is to be known and to achieve lasting merit!

A flawless gem must find its craftsman, and heavy bronze its strong bearer.

The music of White Snow can be played only by those of spirit and skill;

the talents of the great can only be used by enlightened rulers.”

5.

“Yet the shining pearl of night does not lose its luster because none seek it.

The ancient bell and cauldron do not lessen their weight because they lie in dust.

The cloud-harp of Mount Yi does not cease its song because no ear attends.

The true man of virtue does not bend to vulgar ways, nor take shortcuts to fame.

Thus the precious jade becomes a forgotten stone; soft wood lies unused in the workshop.

The red ore waits unrefined, never to pass the furnace of Ou Ye.

The noble and the wise may never enter the four gates of power.

But their worth endures unseen, pure as jade, unbroken by time.”

Chapter 19 - On Accepting Destiny (任命)

1.

The Master said,

“I had a friend named Ju Ling, a quiet and pure man.

He lived in serenity, his body and spirit in harmony, his mind unburdened by outward show or inner pride.

He studied the sacred books with devotion and found joy beyond sorrow.

By day he followed the course of the sun, by night he gazed upon the moon’s light.

No truth was too distant for his search, no idea too small for his reflection.

Yet his carriage never entered the gates of the powerful, nor did his letters reach the courts of the great.

Thus his name remained hidden within his thatched hut, and his body never left the fields.”

2.

Then Minister Yi Liang came to him and said,

“I have heard that when the hidden dragon rises, the dark clouds gather about him. When the transforming rain descends, the worthy spring forth.

Thus the crossroads resound with songs of joy, and even the humble vessel bears traces of the divine wind.

If you offer yourself, you will gather wealth beyond price; if you leap forward, you may ascend to Heaven.

Your light could shine over the eastern valley and your name be known across the world.

Why then remain still while the road to honor lies open?

Though the way be near, you do not go. Though the step be small, you will not move.

Even the wings of a great bird cannot reach the one who sits unmoved beneath the beam.

How then can you, hidden in a far wilderness and folded upon a lonely branch, hope to soar to the blue sky?

Time passes swiftly, youth fades and does not return.

The wise foresee the coming of frost when they feel the cold of early dew.

Why remain idle in retreat, when the seasons hasten toward their end?”

3.

“The wheel of Heaven turns without pause, and the light of day soon wanes.

The ancients sighed when they saw the current of life rushing by like a stream, and they pitied those who wasted it gazing into emptiness.”

4.

“Sir, you are gifted beyond the world.

Your thought is deep as an abyss, your style vast as the sea, your mind holds six kinds of excellence.

Yet you do not rise upon the wind to the heights, nor shine among the great.

Your talent is not set upon the table of jade, your body is burdened with common toil.

You play music of harmony in a deaf land and sell hats of courtly shape among wild tribes.

You live in poverty and labor, refining jewels of thought unseen by men.

It is as if a perfect gem were buried in the earth, or a brocade sealed within a chest. Of what use is such treasure if none behold it?”

5.

“When a dragon or a thoroughbred is tied, it is no different from an ass.

When a sharp blade is sheathed, what separates it from dull lead?

The sturgeon does not dwell in ox tracks, nor the great roc in fields of reeds.

I wish, sir, that you would leave your mountain cave and walk the road of success.

Abandon your solitary purity, seize the moment while you may, ascend from the valley to the height, change your plain cloth for the robes of office, and let your name resound among the bells and tripods.

Would not even the humble gatherers of bracken envy you then?”

6.

Ju Ling replied,

“I have heard that the mind of Heaven is vast and obscure, that fortune and misfortune interweave within its hidden design.

What prospers today declines tomorrow. What is cast down today may rise again.

He who rushes forward cannot escape his shadow, he who delights in success cannot escape its decay.

Better to govern beginnings before signs appear, and to hold to the uncarved simplicity before the form is shaped.

Thus the wise worm bends itself that it may stretch unharmed, and he who understands the course of times is not elated in gain nor saddened in loss.”

7.

“Heaven molds all things, and all things follow their nature.

The restless and the still have different ways, the soaring and the sinking follow different hearts.

Gold is heavy, feathers are light.

The dull cling to what is thick and coarse, the enlightened wander in pure clarity.

The puddle overflows with a trickle, yet the great sea swallows a hundred rivers and is not full.

Shrimps leap in the mud and are glad, dragons soar through the clouds and are free.

Those who bite on sweet bait rush to death; those who savor emptiness preserve their life.

The wise see what is yet unborn and are not deceived; the ignorant strike against the drawn bow and are not afraid.

Each delights in what he loves. Who can compel another to change?”

8.

“I have heard that the five kinds of jade cannot cut themselves from the mountain,

the serpent cannot fly without cloud and thunder,

the sword of the Dragon Pool cannot cleave without the hand that wields it, and the great bell cannot sound unless it is struck.

The divine fungus glows only when stirred by wind, and the golden oriole sings when touched by the morning sun.

The noble steed will not gallop into danger, and the gentleman will not demean himself for favor.

When fortune declines, the wise sink into obscurity; when the time returns, they rise to Heaven.

To boast of oneself is not noble, to advertise one's virtue is shameful.

Why should I abandon the purity of washing my ears to seek the dryness of the kitchen trough?"

9.

"When men are in hardship, Yao may wander by the riverside,

Jiang Taigong may be driven away by foolish women,

Fan Li may suffer insult from fishermen, and Hong Yi may hide his talent among the herds.

But when their times arrive, Han Xin casts aside his rod to command an army, Wen Zhong loosens his sandals and returns to counsel kings, Fu Yue leaves the brickworks to sit among ministers, and Guan Zhong rises from chains to govern the realm.

Thus the gentleman hides his skill while waiting for his season, storing virtue for his purpose.

He does not appear before his time, nor serve an unworthy lord.

When obscure, he is the model of hermits; when active, he is the pillar of the state.

Some labor in writing, others in service, yet all return to the same end - fulfillment of their Way."

10.

"A scholar may live by actions worthy of honor, yet cannot make the vulgar honor him.

He may possess talent for use, yet cannot force the world to employ him.

When dressed in rough cloth and catching rabbits, his heart is joyful as though it were destiny.

When wearing crimson robes and driving a chariot, he accepts it as naturally his due.

To remain ever calm whether poor or rich - this is the spirit of the perfected man.”

11.

“If my home is poor and my skill unpolished, that is my own fault.

If few understand me and no rank arrives, that is no shame.

If they mistake jade for stone, or call the phoenix a sparrow, that is their blindness, not my failing.

Those who fret for recognition and grieve in obscurity are people of the world.

Those who breathe freely and seek nothing are the tranquil of heart.

When the time arrives, the Way will act. when the vessel is great, it does not rejoice in use.

He who knows destiny has no sorrow beneath Heaven.

As for chasing wealth and bargaining for rank, as for trading ten thousand coins to buy the worth of a hundred, losing one’s marrow and heart for trifles. For such I have no time.”

Chapter 20 - On Name and Reality (名實)

1.

A disciple asked,

“I have heard that in the late Han, during the reigns of Ling and Xian, the evaluation of worth became confused, and reputation no longer matched reality.

The greedy and gluttonous rose to high position, while the gifted and lofty remained poor and obscure.

Fame was not based on truth, and value was not set by worth.

Those who were socially skilled were praised as virtuous. Those who were poor and quiet were called foolish.

Why was it so?”

2.

The Master replied,

“When thunder crashes and chariots rumble, some do not hear.

When the seven luminaries pass through Heaven, some do not see.

Is it only the body that is deaf or blind? The mind and spirit can also be veiled.

Thus some hear lofty sayings and do not comprehend them. It is not that they lack ears.

Some see excellence and do not recognize it. It is not that they lack eyes.

Their hearing does not reach subtlety, their vision does not touch greatness.

Those of broad wisdom and large mind are like mountains, firm and unmoved.

Those of petty capacity are like floating weeds, driven and restless.

Because the mountain stands solid, nothing can shake it; because the weed floats light, it cannot find rest.”

3.

“In trade, the most precious goods, sealed and hidden, are hardest to sell, but those beaten with drums and shouted in the market, though cheap and common, are quickly gone.

So too with men.

The tree rooted deep in Mount Song may rise a thousand fathoms and shade a thousand acres, yet few know its worth.

The tree planted beside the road, though crooked and soon to rot, is quickly used.

Thus the ancestral temple displays vessels carved from dead willow, while in lonely valleys great timber lies uncut.”

4.

“Therefore, those who steal bright names soar like ants and lizards to the clouds, while those who possess true worth sink like dragons to the depths.

The small sparrow rises proudly against the wind, while the phoenix folds its wings and hides.

Dull lead fills the sheath where the sword of Tai’a should rest. The sheep and dogs inherit the place of tigers and wolves.

The flatterer fastens treasures to his speech as feathers to his wings, and so there is no height he cannot reach.

He sails the ship of faction and favor, and so there is no distance he cannot cross.”

5.

“He rises early and stands humbly, anticipating every wish and signal.

His smooth tongue and cunning words seem like eloquence.

His gossip and hearsay seem like learning.

His soft face and crooked heart seem like kindness.

His foul conduct and fair speech seem like purity.

His talent for exposing faults seems like loyalty.

His ignorance of restraint seems like honesty.

Thus such men are often advanced.

For in truth, we favor those who serve our gain and neglect those who do not. Such is human nature.”

6.

“The wise are always few, and the foolish many.

The many protect one another and hide their flaws; the few stand alone and have no allies.

The flatterers lift each other up and block the straight road.

The worthy and capable sit below unnoticed; the weeds grow while the crops wither.

So the true dragon falls from the sky, bleeding tears, while the empty snake rises and shines.

Thus Zixi drove away Confucius, and Zang Cang slandered Mencius.

If such saints suffered this fate, what wonder that lesser men are wronged?

This misfortune was born with the world; it has not afflicted one age alone.”

7.

“Thus the dull and crippled draw the king’s carriage, while the steeds of talent graze forgotten in the fields.

The unworthy feed on salary while the state decays, the low crush the high, and the upright are overturned.

Some rot in filth, some are slain in rebellion, some hang from the beams of temples, some perish on the hill of execution.

All because the false are raised and the loyal are rejected.”

8.

“Therefore the enlightened ruler is diligent in seeking the worthy and quick to raise the rare.

He clears the blocked and lifts the fallen.

He does not bind talent to birth or trade.

He listens even to the words of the soldier at the gate or the butcher in the market.

He may raise one from under the ox’s mouth to preside among ministers, or release one from chains to entrust him with the state.

Thus his achievements flourish, his borders expand, his name endures, and his rule lasts for generations.”

9.

“For the straight line is hated by crooked wood, and the just official is the enemy of the corrupt.

If the ruler cannot use clear insight to find the hidden, he must rely on those at court.

But those in power recommend only those who serve their own interest.

They advance those who flatter and destroy those who threaten them.

The man they fear is always the most upright; the man they love is always the most partial.

If the upright prevail, the factions perish and the ruler's power grows.

If the factions prevail, the ruler's authority declines and danger begins.

They fear that mere accusation will not suffice, and so they destroy utterly.

They find pleasure not in promoting the good, but in crushing the pure.

Thus many die bearing their integrity, and many are dismissed without fault."

10.

"But the man who follows the Way and keeps to truth stands firm and alone.

His talent is vast, his heart measures Heaven and Earth, his virtue matches the ancients.

He would rather keep his body pure and remain obscure than bend his shoulders in deceitful service.

He delights in poverty and seclusion, preserving his integrity until the end.

He acts only when the time is right, moves only according to propriety.

Clothed in rough cloth and eating herbs, he feels no shame.

White-haired and unpromoted, he feels no regret.

Would such a man stoop to fit the mold of the world, or fold his wings to serve as a dawn herald?

Better to be ranked among the humble than to compete with fools;

better to live in the forest of phoenixes than fight for carrion among owls."

11.

"The truly great appear clumsy, and their taste seems bland.

They live in contentment and simplicity, knowing and yet unknowing.

Few understand them, yet they do not resent it. The times ignore them, yet they are untroubled.

Though they eat coarse food and wear patched robes, they will not exchange them for the rich man's feast bought with injustice.

Though their coat may not last the year, they do not envy the furs of the corrupt.

They are content to unbind their hair, rest high on their pillow, and preserve what is theirs. Never bowing or flattering for what they do not need."

12.

"He does not befriend those whose virtue is thin and rank is thick. He avoids those whose name and substance are apart.

He does not chase the glitter of fame or mingle with the powerful and lawless.

He does not debate empty talk nor follow the crowd.

His face may seem foolish, but his heart is far-reaching.

His hands are rough, but his actions pure.

He is solid as Mount Tai, which no scale can measure.

Deep as the sea, which no bucket can sound.

Though high in virtue, he hides his wealth and honor.

Compared to him, the greedy and shallow are as weeds in the wild.

His conduct transcends the world like autumn clouds, his spirit dwells at the gate of Heaven.

Though poor and in danger, he cannot be moved by force nor tempted by gain."

13.

“His pursuits can be heard but not exhausted. His principles can be seen but not fully discussed.

Thus the vulgar hate him and avert their eyes; those who love him are too few to help.

To fight ignorance with words is like filling a river with handfuls of dust or quenching a fire with drops of water.

And so, the drums of virtue fall silent, while the noisy gongs of flattery resound.

The sweet herbs are cut down, and the stinking fish are worn as perfume.

The sacred wine is poured away, and thin gruel offered to Heaven.

The fine horses are banished, while the lame and halt pull the imperial chariot.

Thus the ancients, pure in heart, chose to drown themselves in rivers rather than live with such corruption.

Alas, how bitter this age!”

14.

“Yet to cast pure jade into the mud is not because the jade lacks brightness, but because none recognize it.

To throw away the strong bow is not because it is weak, but because no one can draw it.

The gem awaits the craftsman to reveal its worth.

The sword awaits the wielder to prove its strength.

The steed awaits its rider to show its speed, and the worthy await their time to serve.

If the bright jade lies deep in the mountain, if the good bow remains uncarved, if the steed never pulls the crimson chariot, if the wise never serve at court how shall the world know their glory, their soaring flight, their guiding power to bring order and prosperity?”

15.

“Yet even if they remain unknown, they are not mingled with rubble or compared with rotten wood.

They do not lower themselves among the small and base.

Can one draw a high bow with a crooked shaft, or match a weary nag to the chariot of King Mu?

Can one drop the craftsman’s tools and expect to rival Ban and Mo?

To reject true talent and expect order is folly.

Though name and reality may be lost for an age, the echo of virtue reaches beyond time.

He who accepts Heaven’s decree has no fear.

He who rests in the flow of the world bears no anger.

To know the time and keep to one’s peace, what grief can there be? What complaint remains?”

Chapter 21 - On Clear Judgement(清鑒)

1.

The Master said,

“People commonly believe that those of unmatched courage and strength are fit to be generals, and those well-versed in governance are suited for the high offices of the state.

Yet Zhang Fei and Guan Yu, who could face ten thousand men, both met defeat and brought ruin upon their lord.

Kong Rong and Bian Rang, refined in letters and lofty in learning, failed in the affairs of state and met disaster.

But Deng Yu, Ma Yuan, and others, simple students of the fields, mastered the art of war,

and Xiao He and Cao Shen, who had not studied the classics, became perfect ministers.

From this we know that to judge men is not easy.

If one would test them only by trial, one may break a leg before the work begins.

If one would judge them by speech and appearance, one may mistake semblance for truth and mix the false with the real.

Yet the people of the world think it easy, believing that what passes their ears and eyes gives full knowledge.

I doubt this greatly and cannot grant it.”

2.

“To distinguish the worthy from the unworthy, to see the spirit within the form, depends upon the observer; it cannot be forced.

Unless one's clarity equals the sun and moon, one's hearing perfect and without distortion, one should proceed with care and employ men gradually, not in haste.

To entrust sharp tools lightly makes them hard to reclaim, and what is lost is great.

One cannot trust a man for one deed and assume his worth in all.

Those who are like ourselves are not always fit for use, and those unlike us are not always to be ignored."

3.

Someone said,

"Heaven reveals itself in signs, and Earth in form.

Thus when we gaze upon mountains and measure the waters, their depth and height can be known.

When clouds rise and wind stirs, fortune or calamity may be foretold.

The wise see a tree that does not wither and know that fine jade lies within the mountain;

they see a moist bank and perceive the pearl beneath the waves.

When a comet appears, they know the great fish will die.

When the sun and moon are eclipsed, they know the unicorns will fight.

Without lifting or weighing, they can discern the heavy from the light, and without counting or measuring, they can grasp the vast and the boundless.

The wings of the swan and the legs of the swift horse show their power even before they move.

The sword of Hao or the dagger of Xu displays its keen edge before it strikes."

4.

“The young yak has the form of one that can swallow an ox, and the fledgling hawk already bears the look of a hunter.

Lush grass marks fertile soil, great fish dwell only in broad waters.

A tiger’s tail does not grow upon a fox, and an elephant’s tusk does not spring from a rat.

The insatiable heart of Shu Yu was seen even at his birth.

The doom that came from the devourer of his clan was shown from the opening of the womb.

Shen Tong foresaw the theft of his wife by Wu Chen.

Zhang Fu knew at first glance that Chen Ping would rise to greatness.

Fan Li withdrew forever to the Five Lakes because he saw in Goujian the eyes of a wasp and the mouth of a bird.

The people of Zhao ceased to contend for command when they saw that Bai Qi’s gaze was straight and his brow sharp.

When King Wen met Lü Shang, the shadow of the mulberry had not yet shifted before he knew he had found his master.

When Liu Bei met Zhuge Liang, the sun had not yet moved before he entrusted him with his heart.”

5.

“Guo Tai was a man of discernment.

When he went to Yingchuan, he befriended Li Yuanli. In Chenliu, he joined Fu Weiming.

In Waihuang, he befriended Han Zizhu. In Puheng, he studied under Qiu Jizhi.

When he stayed at a guesthouse, he took Wei Degong as his pupil.

When he saw a farmer, he raised Mao Jiwei from obscurity.

He praised Meng Min while the man still bore burdens, and warned that Yuan Ai would surely fail and in all these judgments, he never erred.

To distinguish the dull from the keen by their countenance, to discern haste or calm from their speech, to weigh clarity and darkness by their use of wealth and color, to see the pure and the base in their giving and taking, to know sincerity or falseness from word and act, to judge constancy and trust by the beginning and end. Is this not possible for one who truly observes?”

6.

The Master replied,

“I do not say that men cannot be known, nor that knowledge of men has no pattern.

But such insight belongs only to the truly enlightened; it cannot be claimed by all.

Yet every man believes himself skilled in this, hence my words are given as warning.

A handsome face does not prove virtue, nor a frail body foolishness.

A loud voice does not show courage, nor a quiet manner fear.

Some outwardly appear alike yet differ in intent.

Some differ in nature yet agree in purpose.

They are not like Heaven and Earth, whose patterns are fixed, nor like rivers and mountains, whose forms are constant.”

7.

“Some things distant are easier to know than those near.

The eye can scan the heavens but not see its own neck, the ear can hear thunder but not the hum of gnats.

Tang, Lü, and Fan Xu were skilled in judging men's appearance, yet they could tell only who would be rich or poor, high or low, long-lived or short-lived.

They could not judge the depth of character or the purity of will.

If even the Emperor finds this difficult, how much more the common man?

Your examples concern form and spirit, yet without grounding in their inner roots, you have missed the mark."

8.

"The arrow that misses nothing in flight may still fail to hit the center. Shu Xiang's mother and Shen's son each guessed right once, but could not do so always.

Even the sage kings Yao and Tang erred in appointing men, and the wise Duke of Zhou was sometimes mistaken in his trust.

Confucius could foresee rise and fall in distant ages, yet failed to perceive the worth of Dantai near at hand.

Yan Zhou could discern purity and corruption across a thousand years, yet was blind to the hero beside him.

Such is the difficulty of knowing men.

Even Guo Tai's judgments, praised as divine, were but the insight of one man among saints.

He saw what was visible and clear, what he missed, none could record."

9.

"The highest discernment is to see talent while it lies hidden and nameless,

to recognize the fleet steed while it treads the rocky slope of Wu, to find the pearl still within its shell in the depths of the sea, to discover the gem of light still buried within stone.

Bo Jie's ear discerned perfect tone among ashes and dust.

Pingzi chose bamboo for flutes before it was cut.

At the gathering of armies or in the market crowd, to glimpse a man once and not be deceived, to read the movement of his heart before it is shown, to know his course from beginning to end. This is the unspoken art of true sight.

If one must wait until all his deeds are done, until success and failure are fully displayed, and then say, ‘I know him,’ that is like weighing cloth after it has been cut, or judging silk by the yard after it has been sold.

Anyone can do this. What need then for wisdom?”

Chapter 22 - On the Grades of Conduct (行品)

1.

The Master said,

“To encompass the mystery of Heaven and Earth, to illuminate what is hidden and manifest, to unite brilliance with substance and clarity with depth, that is the nature of the Sage.

He whose spirit is pure and radiant, whose nature stands high above the vulgar, whose heart is empty and lucid as though foolish, who never repeats a fault nor flatters the wicked. That is the Worthy Man.

He who dwells in quiet nonaction, treads the path of rectitude, and holds to fairness. That is the Man of the Way.

He who fulfills all duties to the living and the dead, and guards his body so that his name endures. That is the Filial Man.

He who shows compassion to all beings, and always forgives others as he would forgive himself. That is the Benevolent Man.

He who offers his life to serve the state, who faces danger and remains steadfast. That is the Loyal Man.

He who perceives subtle truth where others do not, who understands the hidden causes of the future. That is the Wise Man.

He who judges when to advance or retire, and preserves himself by weighing order and chaos. That is the Intelligent Man.

He who accepts fortune and misfortune alike, and flows with Heaven without obstruction. That is the Attained Man.

He who will not bend what is straight nor bow for gain. That is the Upright Man.

He who acts with deliberation, calm and without regret. That is the Grave Man.

He who keeps his purity unsullied by power or profit. That is the Pure Man.

He who endures through all seasons and perils, never doubting nor turning. That is the Righteous Man.

He who holds to his word through time and trial, unchanging in decay or loss. That is the Trustworthy Man.

He whose words are elegant and true, whose writing is bright and balanced. That is the Man of Letters.

He who rises with courage to end disorder, who brings peace through arms. That is the Man of Valor.

He who comprehends the mysteries of the classics and masters reason. That is the Scholar.

He who sharpens his mind on virtue and guards each moment of learning. That is the Progressive Man.

He who regards wealth as fleeting and remains unstained in office. That is the Honest Man.

He who keeps his heart steady through gain and loss, unmoved by temptation. That is the Constant Man.

He who labors for the distressed and forgets himself in helping others. That is the Sincere Man.

He who keeps his chastity unto death, refusing compromise or cowardice. That is the Man of Integrity.

He whose speech is clear and reasoned, who unknots confusion. That is the Eloquent Man.

He who remains humble in prosperity and attributes merit to others. That is the Modest Man.

He who keeps harmony among his kin and always acts with propriety. That is the Gentle Man.

He who is firm in decision and impartial in judgment. That is the Just Man.

He who cuts through confusion and acts with precision. That is the Man of Reason.

He who studies the movement of the stars and understands the rise and fall of fate. That is the Man of Calculation.

He who faces blades and beasts without fear. That is the Brave Man.

He who maintains order through dignity and upholds the law. That is the Strict Man.

He who masters craft and art, sound and number. That is the Skilled Man.

He who resists the strong and dares the perilous. That is the Bold Man.

He who labors early and late, forgetting fatigue. That is the Diligent Man.

He who endures slander with calm and stands firm before fear. That is the Resolute Man.

He who meets honor or calamity without change. That is the Discerning Man.

He who acts on what is right without hesitation. That is the Decisive Man.

He who follows rule and measure, not seeking gain through luck. That is the Careful Man.

He who observes rites with awe and keeps peace among kin. That is the Good Man.

He who walks the plain path of simplicity and remains uncorrupted by time. That is the Genuine Man.

And he who possesses none of these virtues, who does not tread even the outer traces of goodness. That is the Inferior Man."

2.

A disciple asked,

"We have heard the deeds of the good, might you now set forth the marks of evil, that the people may be warned?"

The Master replied,

“He who neglects his parents and destroys his health in vanity. That is the Rebellious Man.

He who hides deceit in pursuit of honor and profits by betrayal. That is the Perverse Man.

He who abandons righteousness for safety and harms others for gain. That is the Cruel Man.

He who covets endlessly and delights in slandering the upright. That is the Wicked Man.

He who wounds with strict laws and finds joy in killing. That is the Violent Man.

He who spreads false doctrine and defames the faithful. That is the Slanderer.

He whose words are smooth but whose deeds are foul. That is the Hypocrite.

He who burns with anger and judges without justice. That is the Savage Man.

He who wins trust through small favors but hides venom within. That is the Treacherous Man.

He who bends to power and supports wrong. That is the Flatterer.

He who promises lightly and breaks his word. That is the Empty Man.

He who forsakes righteousness for profit. That is the Greedy Man.

He who indulges in lust and luxury. That is the Licentious Man.

He who hesitates in all things and repents of every act. That is the Dim Man.

He who refuses to learn and disdains the wise. That is the Dull Man.

He who undertakes much and completes nothing. That is the Weak Man.

He who serves power with flattery and forgets virtue. That is the Corrupt Man.

He who bribes and schemes for office. That is the Crooked Man.

He who is arrogant and delights in oppression. That is the Harsh Man.

He who trembles at trifles and feigns injury. That is the Coward.

He who debates idly and reproves the worthy. That is the Shallow Man.

He who is stubborn in folly and deaf to counsel. That is the Stupid Man.

He who knows what is right but does not change. That is the Deluded Man.

He who lacks compassion and forsakes his friends. That is the Cold Man.

He who envies the noble and rejoices in others' misfortune. That is the Jealous Man.

He who hoards wealth and ignores the poor. That is the Miser.

He who gambles with fate and repeats disaster. That is the Fool.

He whose heart is petty and profit-minded. That is the Small Man.

He who hunts and gambles without end. That is the Lost Man.

He who loves ornament and ostentation. That is the Extravagant Man.

He who delights in feasting and forgets ceremony. That is the Dissolute Man.

He who neglects duty and idles away his days. That is the Lazy Man.

He who is rash and thoughtless. That is the Frivolous Man.

He who trembles before wealth and despises virtue. That is the Base Man.

He who cannot discern good from evil. That is the Blind Man.

He who wavers between right and wrong. That is the Chaotic Man.

He whose speech brings ridicule and whose acts defy sense. That is the Awkward Man.

He who betrays his benefactors. That is the Treacherous Man.

He who scorns his humble friends and grows arrogant. That is the Proud Man.

He who roams for pleasure and abandons duty. That is the Dissipated Man.

He who breaks faith and turns against his kin. That is the Renegade.

He who flatters to the face and slanders behind. That is the False Man.

He who resists advice and clings to his own will. That is the Obstinate Man."

3.

The Master said,

"The skills of men are not easily known. The true and the false often resemble each other.

There are scholars of handsome form and graceful bearing.

To see them is pleasing, to hear them is delightful.

Their manner is majestic as dragon and tiger, their movements measured and fine.

Yet within, their minds are clouded and barren.

They possess no real ability. Their hearts are but skin deep.

They cannot utter a single striking word, nor compose a half-decent line.

In office they ruin affairs; on missions they bring disgrace.

Whatever they do, they are unfit. This is one of the hardest kinds to distinguish."

4.

“There are those of plain and clumsy appearance, rough voice and awkward motion.

Yet within, they hide brilliance and virtue, their learning deep and conduct noble, their talent exceeding heroes, their writing blooming like spring woods.

In office, they bring order and success. In arms, they conquer.

This is the second type hard to discern.”

5.

“There are those whose plans are deep, whose understanding touches the mysterious, whose mind comprehends success and failure and whose thought penetrates the unseen.

They combine many gifts, yet have no way to express them.

Their speech is halting, their writing plain; when first met, they seem ordinary.

This is the third difficulty in judgment.”

6.

“There are those quick of wit and sharp of tongue, adorned with graceful words and dazzling rhetoric.

Their eloquence flows like a stream, their metaphors glisten like pearls.

Yet their deeds do not match their words.

They understand the past but fail in the present.

Their governance brings disorder, their leadership resentment.

This is the fourth difficulty.”

7.

“There are those whose outward form is reverent and speech respectful, yet whose hearts are lax and careless.

They receive duties without concern, sit idle in their office.

This is the fifth difficulty.”

8.

“There are those skilled in archery and war, hitting every mark, wielding all weapons, yet inwardly timid and thoughtless.

In mock trials they excel, in real danger they falter.

They flee at the sound of battle and lose spirit before the foe.

This is the sixth difficulty.”

9.

“There are those who seem gentle and weak, slow of word and plain of face, careless of form, appearing timid and humble.

Yet within, they are bold and steadfast, fearing no power, facing death with peace, torn limb from limb without yielding their truth.

This is the seventh difficulty.”

10.

“There are those courteous and pure, faithful and modest, upright in ritual and clean in purpose.

Yet they are slow and impractical, unaware of opportunity, their actions fruitless, their service without success.

This is the eighth difficulty.”

11.

“There are those lofty and proud, upright and unbending, who despise convention and speak bluntly, offending their peers and estranged from the world.

Yet at court they stand with integrity, loyal to superiors and just to subordinates.

This is the ninth difficulty.”

12.

“There are those gentle, humble, and sincere, who conceal faults and forgive others, who are modest, honest, and trustworthy, able to bear danger and protect the helpless.

Yet they are too kind to punish evil, too merciful to reward good.

Their virtue is abundant, but their governance is weak.

This is the tenth difficulty.”

13.

“Things often seem alike yet are not. They appear so, yet are otherwise.

If even the Sage may err, how much more the common man?

Therefore, in choosing officials or friends, one must test with care and examine with time.

For the nature of men changes, one may begin just and end corrupt.

Wang Mang was praised as a model of virtue, yet became a traitor worse than Zhao Gao.

Such reversals no ordinary discernment can foresee.”

14.

“If men were as easily judged as sparrows from swans or foxes from dragons, then the Four Wicked would not have served in Yao’s court, Guan and Cai would not have endangered the Zhou, Confucius would not have been mistaken about Dantai, Yanling would not have regretted casting away gold, Yi Yin would not have waited seventy years for his lord, and Xiang Yu would not have slain Fan Zeng in distrust.

The trouble lies in jade and stone mingled, in moths resembling phoenixes, in clear ice confused with crystal, and mist mistaken for cloud.

Thus few escape error. If even kings fail, how can others claim perfection?”

15.

“Only one whose sight is luminous and whose mind is pure can perceive the hidden and measure the unseen, knowing jade from stone, pearl from pebble.

Such a one, when he judges men, feels no regret in choice or rejection.

If rulers like Wu Ding and King Wen had never erred, then Fu Yue and Lü Shang would not have been left long unrecognized, and the traitors Gao, Hong Gong, and Shi Xian would have found no place to hide.

Thus, choosing men is a great art.

The subtle and the profound depend on the heart that discerns them, a thing no writing can fully express.”

Chapter 23 - On the Cessation of Lawsuits (弭訟)

1.

Master Liu Junshiyou once wrote,

“The moral order of humanity begins with husband and wife, for their union mirrors the harmony of Heaven and Earth.

Thus the ancients revered the rite of marriage, joining two families to continue the lineage of ancestors.

At the ceremony, the host received the bridegroom at the gate, and the marriage command was heard within the ancestral hall.

Silk offerings were exchanged, the bride was personally escorted and seated.

If the groom entered mourning for his parents, the engagement was not broken.

When the period of mourning ended, he would seek permission to proceed.

If the woman’s family consented, the marriage would continue without change.

If the man declined, only then would the engagement be released.

All this was to honor reverence and yield to propriety.

How could there have been any saying of ‘lawsuits before marriage’ among the ancients?”

2.

“But in later ages, people grew light and reckless, corrupting custom and injuring the order of society.

They made promises and failed to keep them.

Disputes and quarrels filled the courts, polluting officials and people alike.

Now, it should be decreed that all who quarrel over engagements, if they have not yet shared the marriage cup, shall be allowed to dissolve the union.

They must return the wine and silk gifts twofold.

If this has already happened twice before, they must repay double the betrothal price.

If three times, then twice again.

Thus the one who breaks the union will have no wish to sue, and the greedy will find no profit in repeated gains.

This is the essential technique of royal governance, an unchanging law for lasting peace."

3.

Master Bao Puzi replied,

"Master Liu grieved for the decay of virtue and courtesy, and despised the contention of the people that erodes moral order.

Though he sought to suppress lawsuits in marriage, his purpose was to preserve harmony and avert greater harm.

He raised upright words to recover what the world had lost, and proposed wise laws to rescue what was falling away.

If this were truly applied, contentious customs would vanish, and the shameless spirit of the age would be transformed.

His argument is vast and sound, indeed, a principle for enduring governance, a most worthy and benevolent discussion."

4.

“Yet I, being dull of understanding, have a doubt.

The union of marriage should be formed in freedom, not through coercion.

The man chooses with discernment. The woman consents according to her heart.

If one promises lightly and repents, the fault lies with the woman’s side.

If faith is broken and feelings change, mere penalties may not prevent it.

Now to punish by doubled repayment may deter the poor, but the wealthy will not fear it. It suits their wish.

If later she meets a man of greater fortune and desires to break the first bond, she will gladly pay the fine.

Her parents, though wronged, must endure in silence.

If we reason by emotion, can this not breed resentment?”

5.

“The defiant man, when shamed, will face death as calmly as home.

Thus bloodshed and murder may arise from small disputes.

To prevent petty lawsuits but provoke deep hatred, is this not like avoiding a mosquito’s sting and inviting a tiger’s bite?

One who buys goods in the market and sees them snatched away, even if offered a higher price, feels wrath and injury.

How much more the man whose promised wife is taken from him!

If this law were enforced, many marriages would proceed with hidden fear of loss even after gifts were exchanged and rites completed.

For Master Liu’s rule ends marriage at the ‘sharing of the cup’, that is its limit.”

6.

“In that case, even if the woman has long received the betrothal gifts, she may still hold power over the man, knowing she can dissolve the union at will.

She will grow lazy in choosing a husband, and the man, if displeased, will seek to withdraw.

Thus enmity will grow, and calamity follow, nothing breeds greater discord.

The laws of the ancients foresaw both beginning and end, preventing small evils before they grew large.

They never allowed such liberty of taking and leaving, but judged by a rule of fair restitution.

Perhaps Master Liu’s proposal opens a dangerous gate.”

7.

“Suppose a woman possesses rare beauty, captivating all who behold her.

If a wealthy or powerful man sees her and desires her, he may offer a thousand in gold, caring nothing for cost.

Would he shrink from tenfold repayment of a betrothal price?

Did not Hua the Minister kill Kong Fu to seize his wife?

Did not the man of Chu, sent to fetch a bride, take her for himself when he saw her beauty?

By such examples we see that men would gladly exhaust their fortunes to win such a woman, even if they must repay all to her former suitor.

Thus the law would cause the poor and lowly to lose their brides, and the rich and noble to seize them.

How, then, shall the ruler guard against such abuse?”

8.

“Some propose a remedy:

When a woman accepts the betrothal gifts, whether great or small, she must give a written receipt that same day, and ten or more witnesses of good standing must sign, including distant kin and friends who would know if she dies or travels far.

Her father or elder brother must reply in writing to the groom’s family, in his own hand, acknowledging the engagement.

If later they repent and proof of deceit appears, then her parents and brothers shall be punished by law.

Perhaps in this way, lawsuits may indeed be prevented.”

Chapter 24 - Admonition on Wine (酒誡)

1.

The Master said,

“What the eyes delight in should not be indulged, what the ears take pleasure in should not be obeyed, what the nose enjoys should not be pursued, what the mouth craves should not be followed, what the heart desires should not be given free rein.

For what entices the eyes is beauty and dazzling form, what beguiles the ears is sweet and wanton sound, what tempts the nose is fragrant herbs and flowers, what captivates the mouth is rare delicacies and rich flavors, what ensnares the heart is power, profit, and fame.

When all five senses are enslaved, calamity surely follows and harms both body and spirit.”

2.

“Therefore the wise man guards his nature and restrains his impulses, letting not the spirit run after things.

He disciplines desire with contentment and sustains himself with foresight.

In curbing passion he is as vigilant as a levee against the flood, in mastering the will he is as firm as a bit upon a galloping steed.

Thus he preserves life within and avoids disgrace without.

Hunger and cold are hard to bear, yet the man of integrity accepts no unrighteous grain.

Poverty and obscurity are bitter to endure, yet the noble heart will not dwell in perilous honor.

He who can count the true gain of virtue finds patience complete, he who knows the victory of the Way casts aside all that injures life.”

3.

“Wine and sweet drink are poison to the body, bringing no smallest benefit yet causing mountains of ruin.

The noble lose virtue through them, the base hasten their punishment.

Few who indulge escape disaster.

All men know this truth, yet few abstain and fewer still are temperate.

They follow the tongue’s brief pleasure and summon the roots of misfortune, as one fevered with thirst plunges into icy water, finding momentary relief but courting death.

Many a home and many a life are undone by wine.”

4.

“Yet the vulgar delight in drunkenness and revelry.

At first the feast begins solemnly and calm, words are measured and manners correct.

They chant ‘The Clear Dew’ and sing ‘Joy in Hao’, raise cups in toasts of longevity and act in the spirit of gentleness.

But before the sun has moved a span, faces flush and ears burn.

The goblets of glass and shell pass in haste, and soon the host’s command to drink flows without measure.

Drunkenness grows unchecked, the stoppers are pulled and reason is cast into the well.”

5.

“Then mouths overflow and noses run, heads are drenched and garments disordered.

They dance and sway, leave their seats and shout as though boiling soup.

Some argue for mastery, some laugh without cause, some prattle to the air, some vomit upon the mats.

Some stumble into courtesans, some tear off caps and belts.

The modest are mocked by glances of scorn, the timid imitate the reckless, the slow become agitated, the dignified leap like deer and fish.

Those who stammer in cold or heat now clap hands and sing, the meek grow loud and boastful.

Rites of propriety collapse and madness surges forth, base nature is exposed and arrogance revealed."

6.

"Clarity and confusion mix, good and evil reverse.

Some rush forth on horse or carriage and plunge into ravines without fear, taking perilous cliffs for flat ground.

Some climb roofs or cliffs and fall unknowing, taking deep abysses for shallow pools.

Some vent their rage on vessels and tools, some abuse wife and child, some torment servants and beasts, burn their homes, cast treasures into rivers, strike passersby or harm their friends.

Some insult their lords and are executed, some provoke the violent and are destroyed.

Such things arise from wine."

7.

"Their speech is tangled and words rebel against reason.

They kneel and bow in confusion, they weep without sincerity.

Subjects offend their rulers, sons defy their elders.

They call honest counsel an insult and pure discussion slander.

Then swords flash, clubs are raised, men strike without thought of life or death.

From drunken quarrel is born the feud of blood, from idle laughter comes the doom of execution.”

8.

“When the young insult the old, the village condemns them.

When they shame fathers and brothers, the sons will seek vengeance.

When they reveal secrets or mock the grieving, even heroes will not bear it.

When they calculate deceit and inflict injury, the sober cannot forgive.

From moments of folly come lifetimes of regret, no speed of horses can chase back what is done.

The wise guard against this, the foolish fall without knowing.

The ruin that follows wine is beyond all measure.”

9.

“Yet in every gathering men still pour cup after cup, whether fit or unfit to drink.

They urge one another, boasting endurance, and think refusal a fault.

They pour drink for their betters till reverence turns to offense.

He who cannot hold his liquor is pressed to shame, resentment and quarrel arise and beauty turns to ugliness.”

10.

“The winds of intoxication cloud the mind.

At first they bring delight, soon they wound and frighten.

When disease strikes, all fear and endure bitter cures.

Why then, when drink brings the same torment, do men not fear it as they do sickness?

If one dreaded wine as he dreads a plague, hated drunkenness as he hates pain, then disorder would cease and folly end.

The illness of wine cannot be treated by physicians, its poison works between breath and thought.

In that delirium men see mountains as pebbles, oceans as bowls, call to Heaven and curse the Earth, lie among beasts, leap into fire and water, and think it joy.

If they so destroy their own bodies, how can they respect ritual or guard temperance of heart?"

11.

"In ancient times Yi Di invented wine and was banished by Yu, the wine-pools of Xia and Shang brought their kings to ruin.

The Duke of Feng was punished for bearing the wine-cup, Jing Sheng decayed through his three rounds of toasts.

Liu Song rotted his bowels with summer drink, Guo Zhen went mad from daily drunkenness.

Lord Xinling met a violent end, Xiangzi's rule fell to chaos, Zhao Wu lost the people, Zifan was executed, Emperor Hui defied Heaven, Guan Fu's clan was destroyed, Chen Zun was slain, Ji Bu cast aside, Cao Zhi was banished, Xu Miao silenced.

All these through wine.

Yet men love it still, many in number; those who fear it are few.

When the multitude delights in poison, how shall one voice of warning prevail?

Let rulers and sages at least restrain themselves."

12.

"In times of famine, when grain was dear, men in drunken brawls slew one another.

Governors then proclaimed strict prohibitions, searching and punishing all who brewed or sold.

Yet though the laws grew harsher, drinkers increased.

They dug cellars for brewing and carried wine in oil-skins.

The people's love of drink, can it not be called deep indeed?

I, a mere commoner, can only write these empty words; what else can I do?"

13.

"Even those who govern cannot keep themselves from wine.

They forbid others yet drink themselves, they pardon their peers but punish the poor.

Thus the people disbelieve, for how can one preach what he does not practice?

The sellers of wine, if forbidden, face ruin, so they bribe and flatter the powerful.

The rich drink openly, the weak dare not speak.

Brewers grow wealthy by monopoly, and the law becomes a hollow form.

When profit outweighs punishment, who will fear the ban?"

14.

Then someone objected,

"Was it not lust and luxury, not wine alone, that ruined Xia, Shang, and the princes of Han?

To ban wine for ancient faults is like forbidding kings to have wives because a beauty once destroyed a realm, or commanding rulers to live in huts because the palaces of Qin fell.

Have we not heard that Heaven appointed a Star of Wine and Earth produced the Mulberry of Spirits?

Wine is used in sacrifice to offer to gods and ancestors; can such a sacred thing be condemned?”

15.

“Yao and Shun drank from full cups, Confucius said, ‘Only the sage can drink without measure.’

The Duke of Zhou feasted with wine and meat unremoved and from this composed the rites and music.

Emperor Gao of Han drank in revelry and conquered the serpent.

Yu Gong drank a great measure and judged the guilty with clarity.

Guan Lu’s eloquence flowed with three cups, Yang Xiong wrote The Great Mystery with wine ever near.

Zi Yu was drunk and unknowing yet achieved hegemony.

A single flask made three armies rejoice, a cup of wine moved thieves to remorse.

Wine relieves grief, seals friendship, joins gods with men; without it, how could rites be complete?

Even the Spring and Autumn Annals praised the feasts of Huai and Mian.

If so, how can you condemn wine?”

16.

The Master replied,

“It is true that Heaven marks the Wine-Star, as the sun and moon hang in the sky and fire and water dwell in the world.

When used with measure they nurture life and accomplish works, when used in excess they burn and drown.

Shall we therefore trust to the sun and say fire does not kill?

Food is life’s first need, yet excess breeds sickness.

How much more this poison of wine!”

17.

“If Xia, Shang, and the princes of Han fell through lust and music, was it not wine that first inflamed their passions?

Wine dulled their sense, loosened restraint, and gave birth to ruin.

You speak of symptoms and forget the cause.

To blame lust but not wine is to complain of the rain upon your coat and ignore the clouds that sent it, to fear dust in the eyes and forget the wind that raised it.”

18.

“As for the tales of sages drinking a hundred jars, these are exaggerations not truth.

The difference between sage and fool lies in mind and virtue, not in height or stomach.

Could any man of flesh contain such draughts in a day?

Confucius feared the change of nature and never drank to disorder.

The Duke of Zhou, though feasting all day, remained sober in duty.

The highest sages trembled before excess. How then shall ordinary men avoid regret?”

19.

“Emperor Gao rose by Heaven’s mandate, whether drunk or sober, he would have slain the serpent.

Yu Gong judged rightly because of his wisdom, not his wine.

The just need no intoxication to be discerning.

Never have we heard that Gao Yao or Zi Chan pronounced judgment in drunkenness.”

20.

“Guan Lu drank in youth to give courage for debate, but when beyond his limit he too erred.

In divining fate, discerning spirits, reading omens, he relied on clarity of mind, not drunkenness.

Could such sight come from wine?”

21.

“Yang Xiong was born with vast talent and deep thought, a gift of Heaven not of drink.

If he drank, it was for leisure or health, not for wisdom.

Zi Yu’s will to power was firm from the start; drunkenness neither made nor marred it.

The joy of armies and the harmony of toasts are metaphors.

True merit lies in clear discernment and balanced action.

When rulers reward and punish with justice, when their plans are wise and hearts unclouded, men become brave and loyal.

But if not, though they drown in rivers of wine, what victory can they win?

To pardon a thief with wine was a hasty expedient, not a virtue.

Indulgence breeds evil; better to be cautious than to follow such folly.”

Chapter 25 - On the Maladies and Errors of the World (疾謬)

1.

The Master said,

“The affairs of the world continue, while rites and teachings decline.

Reverence and humility are forgotten, arrogance becomes custom.

When men gather for drink, some squat, some sprawl.

In the heat of summer they bare their heads and bodies.

Their only occupations are dice and board games, their talk limited to women and song.

Their steps never leave the side of silk trousers and jeweled belts, nor the doors of those rich and drunken with power.

No one speaks of pure discourse or the Way. All take coarse jest and lewd wit as refinement.

They call such behavior lofty, and deem restraint rustic.”

2.

“Thus common men, shallow and vain, chase after this as moths to flame, as light hairs to the wind.

Their jokes reach to ancestors above and women below.

Each strives to outdo the last, fearing to seem mild or dull.

The speaker never foresees the harm his words may bring, the responder, fearing to seem weak, makes his reply more cruel.

Like fields reaped again and again, hatred is sown and cannot cease.

The glib side with the powerful and form factions; the eloquent use their tongues as blades.

They call silence stupidity, and moderation defeat.

In such a world, how can quarrels be stilled?”

3.

“When the witty engage, they know measure and art, using analogy, drawing from history, jesting without harm.

Their words delight yet remain proper, they avoid what others hold sacred or shameful.

But the clumsy twist right and wrong together, leaving listeners dumbstruck.

Beauty and ugliness lose all distinction, such jesting brings not joy, but ruin.”

4.

“There are those who, drunk and irritable, cannot endure insult.

They rise in anger, casting cups and words alike. Hands and feet strike, insults fly toward their betters.

Joy turns to hatred, friendship to feud, lives to ruin.

Some hurl cups like missiles, others expose each other’s private shames.

Did not Lord Chen die by an arrow for rash words? Did not the clan of Guan perish by the tongue?

Disaster and honor hang upon a single phrase, the warning of ‘guard the hinge of speech’ deceives no one.”

5.

“No thunder can recall a word once spoken, no wheel can grind away its stain.

If one cannot speak with wisdom, at least he can cease from jest.

Let his words be measured, his bearing respectful. Let speech be without error and posture without pride.

Then he will be worthy of imitation and love, awe and respect.

This is the art of avoiding disgrace and preserving friendship."

6.

"To scorn men is to neglect one's kin. To quarrel lightly is to despise one's own body.

Both are forms of impiety.

Yet the deluded see not their fault; those corrected hate to hear it.

They envy the worthy yet lack honest medicine, they stray together without a compass of reflection.

Flatterers laugh and praise vice, sycophants clap and call folly virtue.

Thus the erring think themselves clever, believing their sharp tongues signs of wit, unaware they beckon disaster.

Their pride ruins reputation and erodes virtue, not only in life, but for generations."

7.

"For though one may live a lifetime with caution, he cannot atone for one reckless day.

Though he possess the wealth of Tao Zhu, he cannot buy back one mistaken word.

A hair's error becomes a thousand miles astray. C cruel phrase cuts deeper than swords.

Small acts become great, light wounds grow deep.

A feather can sink a boat, trifles can break an axle, a spark can burn a house, a worm can fell a tree.

Why then were the ancients gentle of tongue and modest of bearing, while men today are rash and insolent?"

8.

“Thus the noble man, seeing corruption, turns away; the shallow run toward it.

Without the wise, plans lack counsel. Without upright friends, there is no correction.

The historian’s brush finds nothing good to record, the speaker’s lips find no virtue to praise.

Reputation fades, disgrace spreads, ruin endures beyond the grave, inviting scorn from ages hence.

Such men leave no model to emulate, no legacy to remember. The true shame of a scholar.”

9.

“How can one endure such folly?

To err and not reform is to tread into thorns by choice, to reject sweet food and swallow poison.

They say, ‘Small sins do no harm,’ and thus let evil accumulate till it cannot be hidden.

Their guilt grows vast, their punishment beyond pardon.

I wish men would reform their unrestrained conduct, cast off pride and stinginess, cease boasting and envy, abandon foul speech and mockery.

Then the gate of Zhao Sheng would never drive guests away, and the staff of Huang Zu would be unused.”

10.

“There are some who do not cultivate virtue to earn respect, but rely on force to inspire fear.

Among crowds they stand tall and refuse to sit, they seize the best seats, affect stern faces and loud voices, shoving others to seem at ease.

If opposed, they grow angry and stay unmoved.

In the street they push through narrow ways, galloping horses and knocking men aside.

Alas, this is not greatness!

In ancient times even the humble were courteous; they yielded shade, gave way on the path, and greeted others with respect.

They stood as if their robes were too heavy, walked as if there were no space for pride.

How far we have fallen from such grace!”

11.

“When virtue is full and conduct pure, humility only raises esteem;

but when one’s deeds are base, arrogance earns no honor.

Fine garments may cover the body, but not win hearts.

The hated are not despised for strength, nor the revered respected for force.

Zhuangzi fasted and kings stood in reverence. Zou Yan entered Yan and was met with brooms. Kong Cheng’s village bowed before him. Lin Zong’s courtyard inspired awe.

None ruled by might, only by virtue.”

12.

“To gain wealth by plunder may make one rich, yet never worthy.

To command by cruelty may inspire fear, yet never honor.

Yet the foolish admire them still.

Hearing their voices chills the heart like the cry of owls, seeing their faces feels like meeting ghosts.

Their gatherings are like assemblies of demons, their presence more dreadful than tigers.

The ignorant admire them as heroes, the wicked follow them as models.

From such chaos, disorder grows without end."

13.

"Those who act thus are not always dull. Many come from noble houses and powerful clans.

They once performed good deeds to gain a name, but once the name was secure, they cast virtue aside.

Some buy favor through wealth and beauty, some rise by fortune and flattery, some by marriage to the mighty, others by manipulating praise and blame.

Their hearts overflow, their manners decay, they form cliques and expand their reach.

Pure reason cannot restrain them, law cannot strike them, they become hawks in the temple rafters, rats in the ancestral hall."

14.

"To those beneath them they are tyrants. To those above, they bow and flatter.

They ignore their betters yet oppress their inferiors.

When virtue surpasses theirs, they pretend not to hear; when weakness suits them, they feign humility.

Pestilence ends when frost descends, and flatterers fall when justice rises.

The wise may not overcome them, but at least will not serve or imitate them.

To fight without an axe handle. What more can be done?”

15.

The Master said,

“The Book of Songs praises the dove for knowing distinction, for keeping its proper bounds.

According to the rites, men and women without a go-between do not meet, do not sit together, do not exchange words or gifts, and do not pass objects by hand.

When sisters marry and return home, brothers do not share the same seat.

Words from within do not go out, words from without do not enter.

Women do not go beyond the gate for greetings, and when they go abroad they veil their faces.

In the road, men walk to the left and women to the right.

Such was the sages’ clear rule for preserving separation and preventing corruption.”

16.

“Between husband and wife, intimacy is permitted, yet even there the man does not dwell within the women’s quarters by day, nor does he die in her hands.

How much less between strangers!

In olden days the lady of Lu neglected seclusion and brought scandal. The wife of Confucius failed to keep her doors shut and caused calamity. The historian Ji repented too late for his lack of vigilance. The prince of Wang’s clan suffered disgrace for failing to guard his house.

But now women abandon weaving and spinning, forsake their household duties, and idle in markets.

They neglect the offerings at home and pursue adornment instead.

They wander by night to visit kin, carrying torches and stars overhead, surrounded by maids and attendants.

Their carriages crowd the streets with color and glitter. Servants and guards mingle like a market.

They jest along the road, immodest and detestable."

17.

"Some lodge at others' gates, some return home at midnight, visiting temples and hunting fields, climbing high places and gazing on rivers, leaving their bounds to offer congratulations and condolences.

They lift curtains and open carriages through cities and villages, drinking on the road, playing flutes and strings as they go.

Each imitates the other until indecency becomes custom.

Thus temptation arises from everywhere, and all are eager to follow it.

The roots of lust are fed, the evil grows unchecked.

Punish this in wives, and the nation will stand upright.

Let gentlemen at least restrain it a little, for women without business beyond the gate keep disorder from sprouting."

18.

"The frivolous frequent noble houses, forming ties through wealth and favor.

When fame and rank are roughly won, they cast aside propriety and excuse it as spontaneity.

Their talent is not extraordinary, yet they pretend to freedom. They call shamelessness magnanimity and the guarding of virtue stiffness.

Thus the sons of idlers, flushed with drink and unsteady, band together in groups and wander without discrimination.

They never approach learned men with respect even if divided by a fence, they shout and intrude.

They force entry into others' halls, staring at women, judging their form and features, mocking beauty and ugliness alike.

Who can bear to see such conduct?"

19.

"Some do not even know the host, yet push straight in the household unprepared, they burst through the door like robbers.

If maids and concubines cannot hide quickly, the guests pry and seize them.

Such behavior is monstrous.

For the gentleman, even at home, never intrudes upon his own women unannounced, he calls aloud when entering, and lowers his gaze when climbing the steps.

How then can one violate another's household so brazenly?"

20.

"The idle sons of luxury, spineless and conforming to fashion, call such intrusion intimacy, and call restraint discourtesy.

Such is the world's decay. If one does not join it, one is deemed rude.

Thus they invite one another boisterously, enter houses to see their wives, sit knee to knee in cramped quarters, passing cups at arm's length, singing wanton songs of Wen-jun's longing.

They shout and laugh in obscene play, exhausting all vulgarity.

They mock the boundary between man and woman, trampling the rites of decorum.

Truly lamentable!"

21.

“For the tyrants Jie and Zhou, and the fall of Chen and Zhou, all began in wantonness. How much more the common folk!

When faith is not within, oaths avail nothing. When emotion seizes the heart, the body forgets restraint.

The friendship of the noble rests on righteousness and shared purpose, it grows cool yet endures.

The closeness of the base rests on profit and familiarity, it grows sweet yet perishes.

Why must sincerity depend on feasting, or affection on inviting wives and concubines to drink together?

This is not intimacy, but decay.”

22.

“The ancients foresaw the ruin of lust and set clear defenses, cutting off evil at its root.

To follow their law is to be a gentleman, to break it is to be a criminal.

If the prohibition slackens, men climb into palaces; if the net weakens, women flee to the mulberry fields.

To indulge it is as to kindle fierce fire in the marshes, or to open the floodgates of a thousand-fathom lake. Can a broom or handful of dust suppress it?

Yet the custom prevails, and all excuse it, saying, ‘It is what princes and nobles in the capital do.’”

23.

“I always answer them:

The Central States are the source of the rites, could the rites approve this?

It is the decay of an age, not the style of a pure one.

Laozi, master of emptiness, would not gaze upon what stirred his heart.

Even the virtuous Liu Xia Hui, though firm in chastity, could not remain unmoved if made to feast among the immodest.

How much less the multitude, weak in discipline!

To suppress passion is rare, to stir it is easy.

Such customs must not be allowed to endure."

24.

"The poor scholar knows these manners are corrupt, yet lacking power and fame, how can he oppose them?

He sighs in silence, and the world calls him rustic and dull, unfit for fashion.

But I would rather be true to myself than conform to evil.

Shall I reject what I know is right to follow what others praise?

Alas, such sighs are many and such men few.

Those steeped in corruption will not hear admonition; they rush ever eastward into ruin."

25.

"There is even a custom of mocking brides before crowds, asking them obscene questions in front of kin, demanding insolent answers.

Some are beaten with sticks, some hung by the feet.

The drunken revellers, knowing no restraint, draw blood and maim bodies.

How pitiful!

The ancients, moved by grief, would not light lamps at parting, nor play music at mourning.

In marriage they were solemn, not merry.

Now, since we cannot revive those ancient manners, at least men of virtue, honored and trusted by their towns, should frown upon these corruptions, not join them.

Yet this foul practice is long rooted. Few see its evil.

Gentle words cannot end it, only strict law may.

Thus men scorn Zhou for restraint and fault Confucius for modesty, calling license loftiness.

Foolish indeed!”

26.

“Some by chance or intrigue rise to honor, some by favor of patrons gain swift advancement.

Then they become proud and boastful, looking down upon all.

They stride like clouds, gaze like eagles, content in their own importance.

They summon guests from their beds, or feign illness to refuse them.

They wish crowds to gather at their gates, soldiers to fill their alleys, and all to call them ‘lordly.’

Such vanity they call natural.”

27.

“Yet if we compare by station, the Duke of Zhou toiled humbly, shaking hands and bowing. If by fame, Confucius was gentle and patient.

They all strove for diligence and humility, not arrogance and pride.

But by the end of Han it was not so.

Men tangled their hair, left sashes untied, received friends half-clothed and sprawled.

When they met for feasting and travel, none urged virtue or study, none corrected faults or discussed the Way."

28.

"When they meet, they no longer ask after long absence or health.

Guests enter calling to slaves. Hosts reply by calling to dogs.

If one behaves otherwise, he is deemed distant and unfriendly.

At their banquets they crouch like foxes and drink like oxen, fighting for meat and cutting greedily.

They pull and tear, without shame or courtesy.

They call such behavior grand, and courtesy dull.

They speak all day without a word of meaning, and through the night without a phrase of wisdom.

They twist Laozi and Zhuangzi to excuse indulgence, saying, 'The great man ignores small rites, the perfect man is beyond constraint.'

They call arrogance understanding the Way.

Alas! how pitiful, how absurd!"

29.

"They form friendships through jest and obscenity, sealing bonds with vulgar laughter.

They praise those who lean and sprawl as graceful, and call those upright and dignified rustic fools.

They admire those who flail and gesture as spirited, and call the eloquent rigid bores.

These shallow men gain swift fame by flattery and display, but their brilliance is only skin deep, their hearts hollow.

Like gourds of Shu, large but empty. They know nothing beyond wine and roast meat.

They call corruption brilliance, ignorance enlightenment, greed ambition, and gluttony enjoyment.

As Zuo Si said, ‘They are sons of no worth.’”

30.

“If questioned on the mysteries of the Classic of Mountains and Seas, on spirits and transformations, on the rites of temple and sacrifice, on the cycles of Heaven and Earth, on the laws of music and measure, on the order of state and altar, on the changes of past and present, they are confounded and silent, stammering and lost.

Yet to hide their ignorance, they boast loudly, saying, ‘Such trivia belong to the poor pedants who guard their scrolls in narrow lanes.’

They sneer at learning, calling study confinement, and boast of their emptiness as freedom.”

31.

“Though some know the shame of ignorance and the worth of scholars, they still do not turn back, for the unruly suffer no harm in their advance.

If a noble man admonishes them with truth, they mock him unafraid. If he ranks them low, they should be humbled and reform, but instead they flee, concealing their disgrace.

Thus the path of virtue declines, while arrogance walks proudly through the streets.”

Chapter 26 - On Ridicule and Delusion (譏惑)

1.

When clarity and turbidity first divided, all things were born.

Some creatures could answer to human calls, some could speak with sense.

The ape knows what has been and what will come.

The dark bird understands the play of yin and yang.

Even insects are close to the hidden springs of life.

The milfoil and the tortoise cannot surpass them, nor can the sages of the stars and stones.

Only the man without ritual fails to live by his noble nature.

In the beginning people had no ranks.

Heaven pitied their crude confusion and their dwelling in nests like beasts.

Therefore houses were built to separate men from animals, and rites were made to distinguish honor from lowliness.

They were taught to move with grace, to bow with humility, to stand straight, to fold the hands, to advance and withdraw with rhythm, to look and respond with calm.

These forms were the dikes that restrained excess, the laws that preserved human order.

Thus in the rites one sees reverence in bearing, and among the five matters, the face is first.

When leaving the gate one greets with respect, when alone one keeps inward watch.

Yan Sheng arranged his dress even for bathing, Zhong You tied his sash before receiving command.

If the form of respect is lost even for a while, idleness and pride soon follow.

Without ritual one cannot rule or bring peace.

2.

Ritual is to man as water is to fish.

A fish without water may breathe for a moment, yet soon dies dry.

A man who casts off ritual may still appear human, yet already walks the road of ruin.

The state of Lu held to the rites of Zhou and no army dared attack.

The state of Wei followed the virtue of upright wood and its banners turned back sharp spears.

Chu had a million soldiers in armor yet its power waned.

Qin held strong passes yet its will broke like a withered branch.

They cast away the three roots of propriety and lost their foundation.

Now when comfort breeds desire and disorder endures, customs wither and teaching fades.

Rules decay, negligence becomes habit, and the common people are trapped in confusion like fish torn from water or beasts driven from cover.

3.

Since times of unrest, customs have changed again and again.

Hats and shoes, garments and sleeves, measures of wealth and rank, all change with each generation.

Now long, now short, now wide, now narrow, now lofty, now low, now coarse, now fine.

There is no constancy in adornment, and sameness itself becomes their delight.

Those eager to follow fashion change morning and night, as it is said, when the capital values great brows, the provinces shave their foreheads in half.

4.

I am a simple man, slow to follow the world.

Since fashion never stays still, I do not change and lose nothing.

Though others point and laugh, I pay no heed.

Not that I wish to defy the crowd, I simply see no need.

The northern capitals excel in many arts and surpass the southern lands, yet even there one must choose what is right to learn.

A gentleman practices ritual rather than novelty, and does not alter his native custom to copy another state.

How much less should one abandon his own land's ways to learn new tricks.

Wu has fine calligraphers, Huang Xiang, Liu Zuan, Cen Boren, Zhu Jiping, all masters of their age, as Zhong Yunchang, Hu Kongming, Zhang Zhi, and Suo Jing were in the central states.

Each kept his region's ancient style and all achieved mastery.

5.

To abandon what one has long practiced and labor to imitate another's writing is needless.

How much more foolish to change one's speech to copy the northern tongue.

They fail to gain fluency and invite ridicule, like those who tried to learn the walk of Handan and forgot their own.

This is a small fault, yet worse are those who even in mourning copy foreign ways and weep in another's style until sorrow itself is lost.

Zhong Yi and Zhuang Xi never forgot the sound of their homeland, and the ancients praised them for it.

6.

Confucius said that one who mourns his parents is like an infant bereft of its mother.

Can such wailing be bound to a single tone.

Better to have grief in excess than to perfect its form.

Weeping releases sorrow, what need is there to polish the voice.

Now the wealthy, when in great mourning, if illness comes, take medicines and wine to keep their lives.

If frail, they rest on soft cushions and silken beds, seeking comfort.

Even the petty rich no longer sit in the mourning hall but dwell in side chambers, feasting and drinking with secret guests until drunk.

They say this is the custom of the capital.

Truly it is a pity.

7.

In my native land the elders of virtue lived in true austerity.

Even when old and weak they wore coarse mourning cloth, fasted until thin, and ate only plain gruel.

Even lesser men sought to follow them.

But now people choose indulgence, and how far they have strayed.

Some ignorant ones claim that northerners mourn with extravagance, yet this is false.

I have heard that the four emperors of Jin, Xuan, Jing, Wen, and Wu, when mourning their parents, wasted away beyond the measure of the rites.

They refused the twenty-five-month mourning of the Wang clan and followed the simpler seven-month rule.

At that time all the realm took them as models.

Why then do people now speak falsely and slander the worthy.

Surely this is confusion indeed.

Chapter 27 - On Pride and Arrogance (刺驕)

1.

Those born in noble houses and raised amid power often grow proud without intending to.

Unless a man’s spirit rises far above the common, he cannot avoid the fault of excess.

If one works with humility and empties his pride, many will gather to him.

If he is arrogant and disdainful, many will turn away.

When many gather, peace and harmony follow.

When many depart, danger draws near.

2.

The balance of life and death lies here.

To take pride lightly is blindness.

Some rise from low and humble beginnings.

At first they bow and flatter, shrinking and waiting at the side, bending knees before the powerful, clinging to chance and fortune until they ascend far beyond their station.

Once wings are grown and the husk is shed, they lift their heads high, look down upon all, and think themselves complete.

They gather in noisy feasts, filled with music and wine, and shut their doors to old friends.

When those of equal birth come calling, they see them only in passing.

Those who seek their favor must visit often with gifts and wine.

3.

Mencius said that to love without respect is to treat a man like a pig.

Yet many believe such cold pride is the mark of dignity.

True dignity lies in honoring the lowly and humbling oneself.

The proud custom of this age is a deep disease.

How sad that people are at ease with it.

The truly great are different.

They are lofty in spirit yet quiet in manner.

Their hearts are full and their desires few.

They walk through the world untouched, content within, leaving things behind.

Even if their robes are torn and their shoes worn out, they will not join the flattery of the court or imitate the idle chatter of shallow men.

4.

The shallow judge by appearances and know nothing of depth.

They see only coarse clothes and plain bearing, not the hidden brightness of the spirit.

They value smooth skin and ignore true thought.

Even when such a man holds rare insight and speaks words that could awaken an age, they mock him as dull.

The wise cannot be known by the eyes of fools.

Only those who polish pearls know them among stones.

Only those who have suffered know the value of true light.

The gnat laughs at the great bird that soars beyond sight.

The small fish in a hoofprint mocks the dragon that crosses the sea.

When hearts do not meet, understanding cannot join.

Let those in power not judge by looks, but honor modesty and humility, that Heaven's order may endure.

5.

People have heard of Dai Shulun and Ruan Sizong, who were free and proud, and think them examples of greatness.

Yet they do not see that their talent matched their freedom, while others lack the same measure.

Some imitate them, walking barefoot or with hair unbound, washing their feet before crowds, relieving themselves in public, refusing to eat with guests, or drinking only with favorites.

Such behavior comes from barbarian lands, not from the Central States.

Even with their great gifts, Dai and Ruan harmed themselves by their excess.

If they had shown gentleness and restraint, how much higher they might have risen.

How much worse, then, for lesser men who copy them without their worth.

They will meet disaster before long, and not even their faint virtue will save them.

6.

Once the beauty Xi Shi lay sick by the road, her grace and fragrance moved all who passed.

A woman nearby imitated her, pretending illness, but her face was ugly and her body foul.

People covered their noses and fled from her.

So too with those who imitate the pride of great men without their talent.

The emperor himself bows to elders to teach reverence to the people.

A man without courtesy offends all.

He who disrespects others cannot honor his parents.

7.

If one wishes others to respect him, he must first show respect himself.

Without good deeds he becomes a wicked man.

Without service to the great, he becomes a petty one.

King Zhou of Shang was rich and mighty, yet called a tyrant.

Confucius was a poor subject, yet called a king in virtue.

True nobility does not lie in wealth or power.

Now men act without propriety and yet dislike being criticized, as if carrying a pig but angry when told it stinks, or wallowing in mud but offended when others speak of their filth.

8.

When Xin You saw a man with hair unbound offering sacrifice, he knew war was near.

I see this age full of pride and shamelessness, people acting like barbarians.

Not long after, the tribes of the north invaded the capital.

That arrogance was the omen of their fall.

Now the empire is again at peace and restored to order.

Shall we not correct our past faults and renew the beauty of ritual.

When one walks among tigers, one learns to value courage.

When one lives among the rude, one learns the worth of grace.

Let the wise grieve together and reform the age.

If our strength falls short, at least we should be steadfast as bamboo and pine, unchanging through winter cold.

Why rush to follow the noisy crowd for fleeting favor.

Such a path leads ever farther from the Way and deserves our sorrow.

9.

Some stand firm in righteousness and do not yield.

They do not bend with the wind or change their tone for gain.

People fail to understand them and count them as foes.

Can the world have fallen so low.

Let the noble be upright and unbending, not allies of the vulgar.

Let them lift clear waters to wash away the foul.

Though such men find no welcome and no wealth, if Heaven's grace remains within them, they lose nothing.

Why lament their solitude.

Better to stand alone in truth than twist oneself to fit the crooked world.

10.

A man of principle may not win others' respect, yet his will cannot be shaken.

He may be despised, yet his path cannot be turned.

He may be insulted, yet his honor remains his own.

He may be cast aside, yet his purpose does not change.

He divides right from wrong with a steady mind.

Joy and sorrow cannot sway him.

He knows Heaven's order and rests within it.

Hardship strengthens him, poverty does not bend him.

Can such a man stoop to follow the habits of the corrupt.

11.

At the end of Han, there were men without virtue who gathered in bands and praised one another.

They were proud, arrogant, and careless of the Way.

They mocked true teaching and attacked the righteous.

Their words were foul and their deeds corrupt.

They called themselves broad and open, but they meant open to vice and broad in lust.

True openness lies in understanding virtue and reaching righteousness, not in delighting in shamelessness.

12.

They were like the robber Zhi, who claimed to possess the Way of the sages.

Such corruption wounds human order more deeply than thieves.

It cannot last long.

It does not harm only the robe, but destroys the heart.

The sons of noble houses and men in high office now throw off their caps and bare their chests when greeting guests.

They shame the court and infect the common people.

The young see this and imitate it.

They think that to behave thus is to stand out and be admired.

The way of restraint is hard and poor, the way of pride is easy and rich.

Thus the people abandon the right and rush toward the wrong.

13.

Some rise without virtue, buying office and fortune.

They know how to appear worthy and to build allies.

The corrupt point to them and say, he indulged desire and yet prospered, while the man who kept his virtue remained poor.

They do not see that fortune and ruin come by chance, not by conduct.

Those who call themselves “broad and connected” help only their friends.

They rush about hand in hand, filling halls and crowding rooms.

They praise one another’s words, fulfill one another’s wants, and speak only for gain.

When one of them is accused, they defend him; when he seeks rank, they recommend him. When he attacks, they wound in his name.

Thus the power of the corrupt spreads like floodwater from a broken dam, like fire across a dry plain.

To hope for purity after such ruin is like trying to dry ice with flame or make ashes burn again.

Chapter 28 - On the County Magistrate (百里)

1.

In the order of government, the three high councils and nine ranks sit and discuss the Way.

The provincial governors and district protectors hold the cords and levers of administration.

The greater the office, the broader its ease.

Yet among all officials, none bear heavier burdens than the county magistrate.

All labor and service arise from him.

All levies and taxes flow through him.

If the governor above is wise but the magistrate below is weak, then the state’s work falters and its machinery breaks.

Such failure harms not one county alone but shakes the whole nation.

2.

The county magistrate must be chosen with care, more carefully than the officials of the central court.

When such offices go to the wrong men, the cause is not obscure.

Impartial justice is ignored, while private favor is obeyed.

Sometimes sons and brothers of the noble are selected for their family name.

Sometimes ordinary men are advanced because great ones recommend them.

Sometimes it is a favor long owed, sometimes mere kinship or friendship.

Even when chance produces a few worthy choices, most are not truly fit.

Rare is the man who strives to serve the people, who keeps his life pure and his mind on duty, who fears disgrace more than hardship, and who would rather prove his judge right than prove him blind.

The common sort are small in mind and short in vision.

They chase bribes and crave wealth, indulging their passions without limit.

Their superiors see it but dare not expose them, fearing revenge or loss of favor.

Thus corruption is left unchecked, the people suffer, and the poor are driven to despair.

When despair grows deep, men turn to robbery, and peace is lost.

3.

A house a hundred spans wide may burn from a single spark.

A dam a thousand feet long may burst from one ant's hole.

How can such dangers not be guarded against.

How can the system not be reformed.

Yet those who weigh merit often ignore the balance, and those who wield the axe bend the rule to serve their friends.

Those who choose officials do not seek the right men, and those who are chosen never doubt their fitness.

So government decays, people scatter, and disorder spreads.

Some are proud and wasteful, burdening the people.

Some are harsh and cruel, stirring hatred and rebellion.

Some are dull and timid, leaving all things in confusion.

Some are lazy and careless, letting ruin creep in.

Some start needless projects, tiring the laborers.

Some harbor criminals and oppress the weak.

Some know not the laws and are tricked by flatterers.

Some drown in wine and music, forgetting their duty.

Some gamble and play games instead of governing.

Some hunt and feast while affairs decay.

Some neglect petitions and trials, so that justice collapses.

The people, unable to endure, rise in rebellion.

Punishments grow harsher, prisons overflow, and the ruler's virtue is obscured.

The land suffers, and the pain of the people runs deep.

4.

To appoint the wrong man to office is like putting a wooden bridle on a fine horse. How can it run with the wind.

It is like asking a clay dragon to command the rain. How can it shine in Heaven's sky.

He who governs the realm must be as one who chooses medicine with care.

Let not the lame be yoked beside the swift.

Let not the foolish claim what they cannot bear.

If such wisdom guides selection, the nation will prosper, and all troubles will fade.

The three sovereigns and five emperors will not be alone in greatness, for their pattern may yet be renewed.

Chapter 29 - On Welcoming the Unfamiliar (接疏)

1.

When a man of rare talent meets a ruler of bright vision, their harmony is instant.

Before the shade of the mulberry moves, friendship as firm as gold and orchid is already born.

When a great ability meets a mind that truly knows, no long trial is needed, their understanding is sure at once.

It is like a wild swan rising on a strong wind, like a shining fish leaping through startled clouds.

If greatness could be ignored simply for obscurity, then Jiang Ziya would never have served Zhou.

If humble birth were a cause of rejection, then Mao Sui would not have been honored in Zhao.

If long-standing merit alone earned office, then Ning Qi would not have been raised in Qi.

If old fame alone granted trust, then Chen Ping and Han Xin would not have been chosen by the Han.

The enlightened ruler sees broadly and chooses with fairness.

He does not envy, he does not covet, and thus he wins awe, order, and enduring peace.

He does not count sticks to feed the fire, nor count grains to cook the rice.

He does not discard the fine for small flaws, nor seek purity by stripping away all color.

He looks upon men as Heaven looks upon all things, shining without preference, nurturing without pride.

Chapter 30 - On Equal Judgment Between Ancient and Modern (鈞世)

1.

Someone once said, “Writers of old possessed great talent and deep thought, so their works are hidden and hard to understand.

Writers today have shallow minds and limited power, so their writings are plain and easy to grasp.

To compare the clear and simple of today with the profound of old is like comparing a ditch to a river, or an ant hill to Mount Tai.

Unless water springs from the Kunlun mountains, it cannot flow eastward in mighty rivers.

Unless writings are born from the brilliance of great minds, they cannot carry the deep resonance that reaches far.”

2.

I replied, “Those who only know narrow holes cannot be asked about the boundless sky.

Those trapped in limits cannot be forced to grasp unique insight.

The men of old were not spirits or gods.

Their bodies were human, though shaped by discipline.

Their minds remain in their books.

Their meaning can still be found in their words, and their aim can still be discerned by those who seek it.

That ancient works are difficult does not mean the ancients wished to confuse us.

Times have changed, words have shifted, dialects differ, and wars and decay have scattered the texts.

Some are lost or broken, some mixed with fragments, so that meaning is dim and seems profound only because it is unclear.

The Book of Documents gathers state policy, yet its language is not richer than the edicts and memorials of today.

The Book of Songs is praised for beauty, yet it is not broader than the Rhapsody on the Imperial Park or the Two Capitals or Three Metropolises.

Why then are the ancients held above the present.

Because shallow men cherish what is distant and despise what is near.

It has always been so."

3.

"Thus the new sword gains price by a false engraving, and a dull square vessel is prized by a forged mark.

So ancient books, though plain, are called divine by common scholars.

Modern writings, though bright as gold and jade, are dismissed as clay and gravel.

Ancient works are many, but not all are fine.

They are the mountains and seas of learning, within which writers may hunt and fish for beauty.

Yet even in a vast forest, not all trees build palaces, nor do all fish of great lakes become royal banquets.

Modern and ancient poetry both have truth and beauty, though some may exceed others in grace.

Among men, all may share virtue, yet one may surpass in art.

Among women, all may be fair, yet one may excel in talent.

So with literature."

4.

“When we compare writings on palaces, how does the praise of Lu Qin’s Ancestral Temple equal Wang Sheng’s Rhapsody on the Lingguang Hall.

When we speak of hunts, how does the rustic verse of Shudian compare with Sima Xiangru’s Rhapsody on the Shanglin Park.

When we read hymns of sacrifice, how do Clear Temple and Vast Milky Way compare with the splendid southern hymns of Guo and Tai.

When we read of war, how does Go Forth, Chariots match the thunder of Chen Lin’s Song of the Martial Army.

Even the learned of our day agree that the Three Hundred Odes do not equal the finest works of Pan Yue or Xiahou Zhan.”

5.

“In olden days, life was simple and art was plain.

Now times have changed, and everything is adorned.

That is nature’s way.

A brocade robe, bright and strong, is not lesser than a coat of straw.

A crafted carriage, graceful and firm, is not beneath the rough cart of old.

Writing is speech given form.

When tongues differ, how can all understand each other.

If clarity is counted as fault, why should difficulty be praised.

Just as boats replaced wading and writing replaced knotted cords, so what comes later often surpasses what came before.

In all crafts and labors, each age refines the last.

Why then should literature alone be denied its progress.

The people of today are swifter in every art. Why must we alone believe our words fall short of the ancients.”

Chapter 31 - On Reducing Excess (省煩)

1.

To bring peace to the people and order to the state, nothing surpasses the guidance of ritual.

Ritual completes the pattern of human life and preserves harmony through form and measure.

Yet in ceremonies of coming of age, marriage, feasting, and archery, how endless and intricate the rules have become.

Though social order depends on propriety, it need only establish rank and show respect.

Why then must every bow, rise, turn, and gesture be multiplied beyond reason.

Why must standing and kneeling, saluting and yielding, continue without end.

In times of peace when the realm was quiet, some officials devoted themselves to reviving these ancient forms.

They practiced for months, drilled day and night, beaten and tested, forsaking rest and food.

After years of study, they would be examined in a single day.

Each move was measured against the text, each motion judged, punishments applied for the smallest fault, and yet even the skilled often failed to match the written ideal.

To make such formalities the common rule for all people is beyond reach.

It is as Mozi said “Generations may pass and still not master all its ways, a lifetime may end and still not complete its practice.”

2.

The ancients sought wisdom even from shepherds and woodcutters, they listened to songs of children and the speech of madmen.

When Mozi criticized lavish burials and excessive rites, his words could not be dismissed.

Though his vision of order was vast and his system rigorous, his heart was sincere.

In his call to simplify customs and ease the burdens of the people, there is truth that must not be lost.

3.

After the wars of Jian’an, the Wei rulers, both martial and cultured, simplified the ceremonies of burial, turning toward frugality.

This indeed was the way of Mozi, and it could well be followed.

Now that peace has returned and the world is at rest, the ruler may again reform the rites.

Let him appoint learned and capable scholars, free from stubborn pedantry, to edit the Three Rituals.

Let them cut away what is needless and keep only what serves.

Let them gather what is scattered and unify what repeats.

When phrases differ but meaning agrees, let one version stand.

When actions serve no purpose, let them be removed.

Thus the rites will remain whole yet simple.

The vessels and garments, the banners and insignia, the measures of rank and the orders of ceremony, all can be reduced.

The rules of sacrifice, mourning, and burial, of temples, feasts, and courtly visits, all can be made plain.

Let thrift be the law and simplicity the beauty.

For simplicity brings ease, and ease prevents confusion.

Frugality lightens expense, and light expense removes oppression.

Where order is easy, officials make no mistakes.

Where burdens are light, the people do not complain.

The gestures of greeting and farewell, the motions of rise and bow, need only suffice to express respect, no more.

Let every form be clear, and every document direct, so that all may follow without strain.

4.

Now the five great rites are tangled and unclear.

Adornment has buried their roots, phrases multiply and meanings overlap.

Old scholars lose their way in commentaries.

Disputes and contradictions grow without end.

Each generation adds new glosses and quarrels over small words.

Students grow weary from endless comparisons, wasting years without clarity.

They sigh and toil, their minds bound in knots.

Their hair whitens before they understand.

They waste their lives in pursuit of fragments, neglecting all other arts.

The effort is vast, yet the gain is small.

If these rites were revised, simplified, ordered, and purified so that what remains shines like the sun, bright as the five colors unmixed, then the confusion of ten thousand students would cease, and the quarrels of all scholars would end.

The learned of later ages would admire such reform, even as we now admire the Zhou.

To do so is no harder than ceasing the burning of bones and blood sacrifice of old.

Yet many cling to custom, lamenting its loss as if leaving a warm nest behind.

5.

But when men of habit hear such words, they will be startled and call it madness.

Do they not know that the Three Kings changed their music, and the Five Emperors altered their rites, yet all ruled in peace and harmony.

Sometimes customs must be reformed, sometimes preserved, what matters is that good sense guides both.

Who would insist on riding a boat up a mountain, or driving a horse through a river, or wearing armor to the temple, or fur in midsummer.

If ancient ways must never change, then we should still bury our dead in firewood and wear no clothes at all.

Chapter 32 - On Valuing Breadth of Learning (尚博)

1.

The sacred classics are the deep sea of the Way and its virtue.

The writings of the philosophers are the flowing rivers that enrich and extend it.

When viewed from above, they are like the bright stars that aid the sun and moon.

When seen from below, they are the forests that sustain the great mountain.

Though the paths differ, they all lead toward virtue.

Though their steps are apart, they join in the same transformation.

The enlightened student grasps both the source and the stream.

He holds the guiding thread and finds unity in all teachings.

The ancients sighed at how rare true talent was, saying that even a hundred generations could scarcely produce one who follows the footprints of the sages.

Yet they did not discard a jewel merely because it was not from Kunlun, nor reject words merely because they were not spoken by a saint.

Thus even the rough songs of villagers and the oaths of soldiers, though simple or rustic, were preserved beside the canonical texts.

All the hundred schools, when guided by virtue, share one aim.

As different vessels can all draw water to quench fire, as different methods of healing can all cure disease, so many writings serve the same root.

2.

Since the Han and Wei dynasties, writings have grown in abundance.

Though their meaning is deep as the sea and their words full as the tide, they have the power to summon auspicious signs in Heaven and blessings upon Earth.

They can calm turmoil, strengthen states, and bring peace for generations.

Yet in times without sages, their beauty is praised only as ornament, and their wisdom cannot find a path to act.

Narrow minds remain bound in shallow study, turning endlessly over commentaries and notes.

They scorn what is wide and strange, calling it useless.

They say, “These are petty arts, not worth seeing,” or “Too much learning only confuses thought.”

They do not see that a grain may balance a mountain, that a few numbers may reach into the millions, that many colors together create brocade, that many tones blended make the harmony of Shao and Wu.

Some delight only in delicate verse and easy rhyme.

They neglect the rich depth of philosophical works.

They call earnest words clumsy, and empty cleverness graceful.

Thus truth and falsehood are reversed, jade and stone mixed together, high music confused with the songs of the street, and sacred robes weighed with common cloth.

The world has become so, and it is worthy of lament.

3.

Someone said, “Writing is only adornment. It may show brilliance of words, but it cannot save from error.

Better to seek silent virtue, as Yan Hui and Min Ziqian were placed above the eloquent disciples.

The Four Teachings put conduct first and words last.

How then can you praise the stream and neglect the source?”

I replied, “Virtue and action are visible, their excellence easy to see.

But writing and expression are subtle, their essence hard to grasp.

What is easily seen is coarse, what is hard to perceive is fine.

Because the coarse is easy to measure, it can be weighed and ranked.

Because the fine is subtle, it resists simple judgment.

Therefore I choose to speak of what is difficult and refined rather than what is simple and plain.”

4.

Another said, “Virtue is the root, writing is the branch.

The Four Teachings place writing last.

To write is but the dregs of thought, the straw dog cast aside after the sacrifice.

Is this not clear enough?

Then tell me, what is the true nature of writing?”

I answered, “If a man may cast away the bait once the fish is caught, yet has not caught the fish, can he do without the bait?

If the Way could be practiced without words, then words would be needless, but the Way cannot yet be walked without them.

Writing varies as voices and rhythms vary.

Its depth and reach differ as rivers in their flow.

Its subtlety is beyond measure, its variety beyond number.

Common men see only ink and paper, and think all writers are alike.

That is why Bo Ya longed for Zhong Ziqi who could truly hear the tone, and why the craftsman of Ying could tell when the chisel no longer moved.

Many can carve, yet only Ban Gu and Cai Yong are called masters.

Many can play, yet only Kui and Xiang were known for true harmony.

There may be a thousand horses in the stable, but only one steed that leaves all behind.

There may be countless beauties, yet one surpasses the age.

So too, among writings, there are those that rise above the rest."

5.

"Writing and virtue are as the ten feet and the full measure of a man's height, they belong together.

To call writing a mere side matter is to misunderstand its worth.

Heaven itself reveals signs through patterns, and the sages are known by their words.

The brilliance of kings and the titles of saints endure because of writing.

The diagrams of Heaven, the shells of the tortoise, the hidden marks of the stars. All are forms of writing.

Even the lowliest script bears the shadow of the sacred.

The hide of sheep or ox cannot compare to the pattern it bears.

Root and branch both have their worth.

The plain cloth gives ground to brocade, the rough stone shelters the pearl.

Rain begins as mist, rivers begin as drops.

So too, though writing is the younger brother of virtue, it cannot be dismissed as mere ornament.”

6.

Someone asked, “The writings of today fall short of the ancients.

Has the spirit of the age declined, and is this the law of nature?”

I answered, “Among the hundred schools of our time, though their forms differ, all spring from deep thought and the hands of worthy men.

When compared with the ancients, they are not all lesser.

Some are vast and profound, joining the secret within with the boundless without.

Their roots are noble, their expression wondrous.

They are not trapped by rules, nor confined to one path.

But those who taste only salt or sour cannot know the full flavor, and those whose thought is shallow cannot feel their spirit.

When the divine dragon slowly rises and soars through the clouds, the ant at its feet cannot imagine how it flies.

When the blood-sweating steed runs a thousand li, the dull donkey fears it for moving too fast.

So those who gallop within the meadows of verse, circling the plains of chronicles, yet judge the vast by the small, the deep by the shallow, will never reach understanding, though they study all their lives.”

7.

Those who enjoy something praise it as good.

Those who do not understand it call it false.

Such is human nature.

People condemn what they cannot grasp, not out of malice but out of ignorance.

The common mind worships what is ancient and despises what is present.

Though there be steeds as swift as the wind, they say none equal Zaofu of old.

Though there be jewels worth cities, they say none equal the tears of the man of Chu.

Though there be swords that cut iron, they say none match those forged by Ou Yezi.

Though there be medicines that raise the dead, they say none compare to the elixir of He and Que.

Though there be men who surpass all others, they say none match those written on bamboo and silk.

Though there be books that benefit the world, they say none equal the relics of the past.

Thus Confucius was not honored in his own time, and the Great Mystery was ridiculed by its peers.

People claim that mountains today are not as high as those of old, that seas are not as wide, that the sun is not as hot, that the moon is not as bright.

How then will they ever admit that men of today are equal to those who came before.

To honor what is distant and despise what is near has long been humanity’s disease.

Even those who broke their harps and cut their strings did so from despair at this blindness.

Chapter 33 - On the Faults of the Han (漢過)

1.

When I survey the records of the past and look to the recent age, no time has shown greater decay of virtue and confusion of order than the later years of the Han.

At the height of power, eunuchs and courtiers controlled the sacred instruments of state.

They held the levers of command, overturned the just, raised up the wicked, destroyed benevolence, and harmed righteousness.

They trampled those they despised, welcomed the dull and the blind, and gathered their circle of corrupt allies.

They hoarded wealth without measure, yet could not give even a coin to relieve the poor or support the upright.

Promotion came only through riches.

In the courts, those who paid most were declared innocent.

High rank and great power gave strength enough to crush merit, yet not enough to lift a single worthy voice.

Appointments went to their wives and kin.

Favor never passed beyond their narrow circle.

They forgot the lesson of honest ministers, and mocked the virtue of men who served without selfishness.

They divided rewards among their flatterers and followed the ways of sycophants.

Thus upright men filled their homes but received no pity like Zheng Yang.

The lofty stood together, but none recommended the worthy like Bao Sheng.

The solitary were suppressed, the attached were advanced.

So Fan Ji covered her mouth in sorrow, and Feng Tang sighed for all time.

2.

In that age, most who held office were idle eaters and hollow faces.

They concealed the virtuous and envied the able.

They feared those who gained merit and sought their ruin.

They hated the pure and honest and drove them out.

They slandered the loyal and righteous and cast them into prison.

They shunned the upright and left them isolated.

Those who flattered and bowed low received honor and favor.

Those who stood firm were mocked and dismissed.

They raised wolves and slew tigers, planted thorns and cut down cinnamon.

The arrogant and unrestrained were praised as broad-minded.

The sharp and cruel were called upright and fair.

The clever and deceitful were called wise and perceptive.

The smooth-tongued and flattering were called clear and elegant.

The hasty and boastful were called grand and heroic.

The drunken and lustful were called natural and free.

The greedy and grasping were called generous and unbound.

Those who wore their hair loose and mingled with the base were called open and universal.

Those who twisted the teachings of sages and spoke against truth were called the guests of Lao and Zhuang.

Those who mocked and scorned others were said to have pure and lofty charm.

Those who bent their shape to every circle and echoed every voice were said to be men of unmatched talent.

Those who leaned on power and bribed their way through ranks were said to know change and genius.

Those who neglected duty and left papers unread were said to have great purpose and ambition.

Those who relied on noble kin and sat above their skill were said to be peers of the Four Lords.

Those who bought titles and sold honor were said to prize righteousness above gold.

Those who gathered friends and flattered each other in deceit were said to join in learned fellowship.

Those who claimed to speak with ghosts and spirits were said to commune with the divine.

Those who divined fortunes and deceived the simple were said to know the mysteries of fate.

Those who played with spears and horses in reckless strength were said to be generals of the highest order.

Those who gathered gossip and empty talk were said to be great scholars and thinkers.

3.

As for the truly upright, those clear in spirit and steady in conduct, they held themselves apart.

They did not flatter to win favor or twist words to please men.

They walked in frost and snow, keeping their integrity pure.

They followed the Way and held to what was right.

Though the wind was fierce, their branches did not bend.

Though they suffered hardship, their will did not change.

When they spoke, they gave sharp remonstrance and honest counsel.

When they withdrew, they kept their hearts sincere and free from greed.

They did all they could for good, yet were called foolish and simple.

Those who rose early and slept late, who labored in duty and ruled with care, were dismissed as petty and dull.

So the wise hid their light and feigned ignorance.

The noble concealed their gifts and pretended to be common.

The lowly sought escape like birds from a burning forest.

The bound submitted outwardly and lived as exiles within.

The knowing kept their thoughts hidden.

The brave restrained their strength.

The loyal withdrew and were cast aside.

The treacherous triumphed and ruled.

Evil flowed like a flood that could not be stopped.

Deceit opened its road and could not be closed.

The proud oppressed the humble, the strong plundered the weak.

Rebels rose like ants.

The eunuchs usurped the authority of the throne.

Three nobles met their end at the hands of slaves.

The faithful and renowned were accused of forming factions.

They were imprisoned and executed, while the empire mourned.

Innocent people, behind closed doors, met ruin without guilt.

A faint smoke rose within the palace walls and soon the whole realm was in flames.

A small crack in the foundation grew to waves that drowned the world.

Strong fortresses fell to common thieves.

Great moats were crossed by reeds.

The brave froze in terror and fled.

Soldiers turned their spears upon themselves.

Fire swept through the gates of the palace.

Barbarians roamed the forbidden halls.

Grain sprouted in the courtyards of temples.

Weeds grew thick upon jade steps.

The painted towers became dens of foxes and hares.

The tall gates of the capital turned into the paths of tigers and leopards.

The eastern school was burned to ashes.

The people perished in fire and despair.

The houses of traitors stood tall, while the loyal were destroyed.

Their crimes were carved in bamboo and stone, yet no praise remained in bronze or marble.

And why was this so?

Because it was the work of men.

Chapter 34 - On the Fall of Wu (吳失)

1.

In the waning years of Wu, the same disease that destroyed former dynasties appeared again.

They saw the ruin of those before them, yet did not change their ways.

Though the memory of disaster was still fresh, they followed the same broken path.

They watched others fall and laughed in false safety, not realizing their own peril was the same.

They saw another’s boat sink and thought themselves on different waters, not knowing that all drowning is alike.

I was born in the Jin age and did not see these things myself, but my teacher Master Zheng had lived through it and often told me.

He would say, “In Wu’s last years, corruption was deep and disease incurable.

The worthy were unused, the corrupt were placed in order.

Law and order dissolved, and great ships of state leaked from a thousand holes.

Those who paid heavy bribes advanced first, those who joined strong factions stood on the right.

Without wealth or power, one could wait a lifetime and never hope to rise.

Those pure in virtue and lofty in conduct were left to languish.

Those with cunning and connection rose swiftly like clouds.

The ruler above was dim, the ministers below were deceitful.

Without faction there was no favor, without competition no promotion.

Public spirit vanished, integrity decayed.

The small bird rose with the storm and claimed the sky.

The rotten boat caught the swift wave and raced like lightning.

Phoenixes tangled in brambles, swans lay stranded in the mud."

Those who governed were either kin of the empress or flatterers of the court.

They added nothing to the state, neither correcting faults nor hearing the people's cries.

Their speech was icy and ornate, yet their conduct was foul as stagnant water.

They felt no shame in drawing pay without service, no fear of bringing ruin through their greed.

They wove words as a silkworm spins its thread, and turned fear and favor into their harvest.

Their chariots gleamed bright enough to mirror faces.

Their houses were grand enough for flocks of birds to rest upon.

Their wrath was swifter than thunder, their gifts faster than spirits.

Their influence outweighed the power of princes, their wealth surpassed the public treasury.

They paraded with golden guards, walked beneath jeweled beams.

Their servants filled armies, their gates became markets.

Cattle and sheep covered the plains, their ponds stretched for miles.

They pretended to be humble like Zhao Jian or Pingzhong, but their hearts were black with greed.

They praised themselves as pure like Tao Kan and Wen Xin, yet their hands were stained like Anchang and Dong Deng.

They welcomed guests with empty courtesy, gave no food to the hungry scholar, and offered no aid to the poor.

Yet their halls overflowed with gold and jade, their rooms with concubines and dancers.

Their ships filled the rivers, their barns overflowed with grain.

Their gardens rivaled the imperial parks, their mansions imitated the palace of Heaven.

Their dogs and horses gorged on meat, their treasures rotted in sealed chests.

2.

When they received men of talent, there was not even the thinnest kinship of reed or rush.

When they served themselves, they left nothing undone.

Some never opened the law books, yet presided over the courts.

Some did not know the place of the desk and brush, yet held key offices.

Some could not name the Five Classics, yet drew salaries as scholars.

Some could not write a line of text, yet sat among the authors of the realm.

Their pens never moved, yet they held rank among the critics.

They bowed and fawned, and were chosen for inspectors.

They could not discern men’s worth, yet were placed in charge of appointments.

They knew nothing of the art of war, yet strutted beneath the banners.

They had fled in battle again and again, yet still kept the title of general.

They could not tell barley from wheat, yet were made advisers to the throne.

Such men were fish painted with dragon scales, false in form, hollow in strength.

They rejoiced when near water, but feared at the sight of an otter.

Even if threatened by sword or tempted by treasure, their nature could not be changed.

How could such weak wood bear the weight of the nation’s carriage?

How could one drop from a cup fill a thousand measures?

To trust such men with state affairs is like setting a feather against a mountain, or tying straw dogs and commanding them to hunt.

Their uselessness was clear as day.

3.

The ruler of Wu did not reflect upon this.

He did not tremble at night or examine his faults.

He gave his confidence to flatterers and fools, and placed heavy burdens in their hands.

Disaster drew closer than a drawn bow, ruin brighter than the sun and moon, yet he thought himself safe as Mount Tai and glorious as Yao and Shun.

His eyes were weary from gazing at fine ornaments, and he saw not the losses of the state.

His ears were dulled by seductive music, and he heard not the words of truth.

His stores of silk and grain were wasted on pleasure, while soldiers froze and starved.

His heart was bound to beauty and indulgence, and forgot the weight of the ancestral temples.

He took lightly the source of rise and fall, and neglected the roots of the nation’s life.

4.

Master Zheng said that his own teacher, the recluse Master Zuo of Mount Tianzhu, refused office and shunned reward.

He did not seek the favor of princes, yet longed in secret for peace under Heaven.

He often sighed within his humble hut and said to his disciples:

“The Han will shine again.

A yellow essence will rise and bind the stars.

Its light will return to the north, and its virtue will dwell in the east.

Heaven and Earth will be joined.

All lands will be blessed.

Foreign envoys will fill the court, and peace will spread beyond the borders.

When this happens, rulers must guard the Way with ease, for peace is easy to lose.

The music of five strings will fall silent, and the songs of joy will cease.

The dragons will hide, the phoenix will not rise, the white tiger will fade, and the red flower will not bloom.

The harmony of Heaven and Earth will falter.

The seasons will lose their order.

Thunder will roar from clear skies.

Frost will fall in midsummer.

The light of the lamp will dim, and the wine of the altar will not rise.

Offerings will fail, and the good will not flourish.

Why?

Because the wicked are not removed, and the worthy are not raised.

The foolish rule, and the wise are cast aside.”

5.

He also said, “There are those of broad heart and deep mind who wear coarse cloth yet hide jade within.

They keep stillness and purity, desiring nothing of the world.

They remain hidden like deep springs, content to forget the dust of men.

They act only when it is right, speak only when the time calls.

In hardship they do not complain, in poverty they do not regret.

They are at peace with Heaven’s decree, unmoved by fortune or shame.

When they advance they do not boast, when they withdraw they do not grieve.

Such men would rather die in silence beneath a broken roof than sell their virtue for gain.

They will not flaunt their inner treasure to compete with base stones.

The ways of Confucius and Mozi were once ignored.

Mencius and Yang Xiong also lived in poverty.

Virtue without its time has always been so.

There are no eyes like Li Zhu's to tell black from white, no minds like Guan Zhong's to discern worth.

Pebbles fill the treasury, while gems are cast into the ditch.

The master craftsmen are gone, and no one knows fine wood.

Ah, how sad it is.

I was born too late and too early, yet I shall live to see the land of Wu transformed into the realm of Jin, and the people of the south become servants of the north."

He had scarcely spoken when the House of Sun was buried in its coffin.

6.

When I, Baopuzi, heard this, I said:

"These two teachers spoke the truth and their words should be a warning to later ages.

I have written them down so that men may know. Wu fell not by fate, nor by Heaven's decree, but by the faults of men.

If one hides a nation's wrongs and refuses to correct them, then the straight pen of Dong Hu has no worth, and Jia Yi's warning against Qin was spoken in vain."

Chapter 35 - On Guarding Simplicity (守堉)

1.

Baopuzi said,

I had a friend called the Recluse Master.

He admired the stillness of ancient sages who did not contend, and built his dwelling with rough earth and humble walls.

He devoted himself to learning and the arts, yet suddenly turned his mind to farming.

Year after year he labored and failed.

Hunger showed on his face.

Someone came and reproached him, saying,

“Heaven knows that propriety begins with full granaries, and generosity comes from abundance.

Excellence grows from surplus, while frugality is born from lack.

Thus the poet praised ten thousand bushels, and the state placed food and wealth first among the eight affairs of government.

To till the soil and join in the ancient harmony of the plough is the foundation of the sage’s joy.

The true scholar should soar like a crane in high office, yet when retired should delight in fields and furrows.

Look at the wise men of old.

When they governed, they were companions of kings.

When they withdrew, they possessed lands of a thousand gold.

They divided rich fields, worked with diligence, planted beans and millet in ordered rows, harvested grain to fill their barns by the thousands, and stored up abundance for the poor.

They rode in carriages to the hunt, and feasted upon jade dishes.

Even the ancient kings themselves lived this way.

But if you now remain in dry soil and barren hills, when the sun burns and the rain fails, there will be no crops.

Your granaries will be empty and your kitchen cold.

You sit waiting like one hoping to snare a rabbit, without plan or care.

I fear your fate will be that of Shouyang, who starved on his mountain, or of Dan Shan, who perished in his cave.

Your friends pity you, yet you remain unmoved.

To see danger and not act cannot be called wisdom.

To cling to barren soil and refuse to move is the way of common folk.

Could it be that you mistake poverty for virtue, and call folly divine?

How long will you sleep without awakening?

The robes of ritual do not stop arrows, and the words of the sages do not warm the cold.

Why not look upon the fertile plains, take up the noble work of the farmer, lay aside the empty scrolls, and harvest abundance to relieve the hungry?”

2.

The Recluse Master replied,

“The deaf cannot be taught the harmony of bells and zithers, the blind cannot be shown the difference between cinnabar and lacquer.

The frog at the bottom of the well cannot be told of the ocean, and the vulgar cannot be persuaded by the Way.

You speak of the small skill of the old farmer, but not of the great clumsiness of the one who faces the wall.

It is like casting away jade for pebbles, or turning your back to daylight to chase the glow of a torch.

Taste and choice cannot be forced into one mold.

Desires and pursuits differ from man to man.

He who wishes to climb the lofty peaks will not linger in the valleys.

He who dreams of sailing the southern sea will not idle beside a pond.

Thus, to one who listens for the pure tones of the Nine Hymns, the songs of the barbarians bring no joy.

To one who feasts on rare meats, the taste of bitter herbs brings no pleasure.

The roc soars above the red sky, while the wagtail flutters among the reeds.

Each follows its nature to its end.

The mayfly knows only the morning, and the summer insect cannot understand winter.

How can such creatures grasp the depth of the dragon’s still waters?

Though my meal is of coarse berries and plain herbs, it is as satisfying to me as a feast in a jeweled hall.”

3.

Thus Liezi did not hunger for the stipend of Zhengyang, nor did Ceng Shen trade his poverty for the wealth of Jin and Chu.

To gather the faint words of the fading age was the long path of Zhou and Confucius.

To labor solely for profit was the sin of Meng Ke’s disciple.

No man can walk two roads at once, nor serve both the plough and the pen.

If the body be weary but the spirit content, what harm is there in living with little?

Moreover, to dwell in barren soil is laborious, yet labor brings clarity.

To dwell in fertile soil is easy, yet ease brings luxury.

Clarity gathers blessings.

Luxury calls misfortune.

When blessings gather, even weakness may rise and poverty may flourish.

When misfortune comes, even strength will fail and prosperity will die.

These things come unbidden and cannot be escaped.

Therefore, to correct the end, one must first purify the root.

To stop the current, one must dam the spring.

When virtue is established, the gate of extravagance closes.

Jiang Wang was of supreme virtue, and yet ceased to plough.

Chong Hua was a great sage, and yet fished no more.

Their names were carved in jade, their works rose above twenty generations.

Why call them idle or lazy?

When two men divide wealth, he who takes less is called noble.

So I renounce the abundance of the world, and dwell in this narrow and simple land.

I leave the rich fields of Anchang and choose the quiet northern slope.

Though small in possession, I lack nothing.

The North Star is honored because it does not move.

The Five Mountains are revered because they do not wander.

The cricket shifts its burrow often and is never prized.

The fish that gorges in the deep is soon caught.

I will sow the Six Virtues as my grain, and till the Nine Classics as my field.

My harvest shall fill the space between Heaven and Earth.

Why must I labor with the hoe and plough?

Did not one sage cast away his robe to stop a thief, and another scatter gold to save his sons from greed?

Zhou Guan took barren land to cure his desires, while Ni Que filled his coffers and met his ruin.

Tao Gu hoarded treasure and brought calamity.

Gain and loss stand plain before us.

Can we not learn from them?”

4.

At this, the questioner was silent.

For a long time his mouth was open but no word came.

His head bowed and could not rise.

At last he sighed deeply and said,

“Now I see.

Those who seek to leave a name for eternity do not let wealth cloud their harmony.

Those who draw the curtain and study through the night do not waste their sight on gardens.

To tempt the phoenix with the taste of a chick, or to snare the tiger with the shell of a crab, is folly indeed.

How shallow I was not to understand sooner.”

Chapter 36 - On Being at Peace in Poverty (安貧)

1.

Baopuzi said,

When the Han fire dimmed and dragons fought with tigers, the world was torn into pieces and divided among three powers.

There was then a certain Master of Contentment, a man who loved Heaven’s order.

He fled the wars and wandered through the lands of Shu and Yi.

At first he lived near Wenxiu, and in later years was known by Zhuge Liang.

His speech was lofty and his conduct upright.

He stood alone and did not follow the crowd.

The people feared him for his integrity and few dared befriend him.

Though the two great ministers admired his virtue, they could not overcome the weight of worldly opinion.

So this man remained in poverty and obscurity, his hair turning gray among the thorns, yet his coarse clothes were never exchanged for silk.

The ruler of the time sought the worthy but did not hear of him.

The men in power saw his worth but did not recommend him.

He lived in a narrow alley beneath a thatched roof, with no part in the affairs of the realm, forgetful alike of rank and wealth.

His meals of berries and wild herbs were often empty, and he rose each morning not knowing how he would eat at night.

2.

One day a nobleman came and questioned him, saying,

“I have heard that those who possess the talent of Yi Yin or Lü Shang

do not remain long in poverty, and those with the skill of Yi Dun do not endure hunger and cold.

The wise know how to change with the times, and the clever never suffer want.

When Fan Li appeared, he destroyed Wu and enriched Yue.

He was a statesman in power, and a merchant in peace, amassing wealth beyond measure.

Heaven sets poverty among the six misfortunes and riches among the five blessings.

Does not the Book of Poetry praise the beauty of abundance?

Does not the Book of Changes esteem the gathering of men?

When the bait is fragrant, the fish will come.

When the reward is heavy, the brave will act.

Thus Zhang Liang left prison for a lord’s estate, Lu Buwei gained ten thousand households, and Zhuo Wenjun’s husband rose from disgrace to nobility.

The frugal may win regret, the generous receive gold by the thousands.

Yet you, master, possess no plan like Shao Bo’s, and spend your life studying the Six Classics.

You despise the real profit of grain and silver, and chase the empty fame of eternity.

You are ashamed to flatter the powerful, and scorn to sell your name for rank.

You wait for the Duke of Zhou to hunt again, and for the Yellow River to turn clear.

You are content to eat weeds like Liezi, and claim to preserve your spirit while forgetting your body.

Is this not as foolish as painting a horse to replace walking, or pointing to the sea to quench one’s thirst, or casting a fishing net upon a mountain peak?

The age now belongs to power and wealth.

Heroes contend, traitors flourish.

The slow are trampled by the swift, and the hungry are devoured by wolves.

The rich gain office through bribes, while the pure are buried in dust.

The scholars abandon the Way of the sages, and follow the tricks of the Five Hegemons.

The learned forget the Four Virtues, and chase the judgments of the crowd.

Those with full baskets advance from the fields.

Those without wealth retreat from court.

Those who hold gold climb to jade halls.

Those who recite books fall into the mud.

Those who bring rich gifts turn stones to gems.

Those who come with nothing are turned away.

Those with allies soar with the storm.

Those alone sink like turtles in a pond.

3.

Now the mud of the marsh cannot dam the boiling lake, nor can one good man reverse the course of a corrupted age.

You have no grain stored within, no funds without.

Your words shine like dragons and tigers, your writings flow like waves and shimmer like silk, yet you freeze and starve in a single narrow room.

Who will pity you or save you?

Why not board a light boat and follow the wind, hoist a sail and trade among the distant lands, exchange treasures from the south and north, gather gold and jade from the far mountains, win noble rank in prosperous times, and free yourself from this wretched cold?

To labor for writing that none will read, to wear out your years for fame alone.

This is the folly even the followers of Lao and Huang would mock.”

4.

The Master of Contentment replied,

“I have studied the Six Arts to their depth, and mastered the Eight Teachings of inquiry.

This is wealth enough.

My words are refined and my virtue pure.

This is honor enough.

To seek benevolence and attain it, what more need I ask?

I dwell in the deep and nourish my spirit, I look beyond things and rest in the self.

I cast off the dust of the world's struggle and cleanse my mind in silence.

I gaze within, not out of the window, and discern truth without confusion.

Though you place me in halls of jade and bronze, I would not change my heart.

How could I trouble myself to contend for profit with merchants, or strive for advancement with the vulgar?

If you know that trade brings wealth and farming ends hunger, yet still chase both, you are like the man who hunts deer but forgets the rabbit, or who travels far and wonders why he arrives late.

Was not Lü Shang once a butcher before he became a sage?

The heavy weight of ten thousand measures cannot be moved by the wind.

Before the music of Shao was completed, the spirit birds already circled in harmony.

He who waits for the rising wind will one day soar.

He who can run a thousand miles does not quarrel with the mules.

The truly filial fear to disgrace their parents, as Zi Chun trembled at the foot of the stairs.

The truly wise scorn the perilous wealth of the world, as Yao and Shun cast aside gold.

The enlightened foresee disaster before it comes.

The wise hear the promise of profit and already think of danger.

But you would urge me to chase trade and gain, to sail across perilous seas, to grasp pearls by risking my life.

You would have me play with the tiger's mouth for a mouthful of meat.

You forget the warning of the body and the peril of the deep.

When mountains crumble and the sea rages, your frail boat will be swept away.

Then you will lament too late, and know the insight of the truly wise."

5.

"In old times, Yan Hui was praised for purity and simplicity.

Chen Ping survived danger through poverty.

Guan Han loved profit and died for it.

Ni Que loaded his cart with treasure and perished in ruin.

A poor man was slain for holding a jade, and Feng Hu met disaster for wearing fine fur.

And now you would teach me the ways of thieves, and urge me to summon robbers with riches.

You offer poison as wine, and call it kindness.

For a true scholar, the Three Records are his gold and jade, the Five Classics his lute and harp, study his drum and bell, the Hundred Schools his flutes and reeds.

He feeds on truth until full, and drinks of virtue until content.

He rises above the dust of the world, and his name resounds through ten thousand ages.

How could such a one be stained by greed?

He who hoards much will lose much.

He who exalts himself will meet decline.

He who hides his light will soon be cut open.

He who follows the overturned chariot will surely fall.

He who overloads his boat will sink.

He who grasps too much will destroy himself.

These are the ways of the foolish, not the path of the virtuous.”

At these words, the questioner was overcome.

He bowed low and said,

“Let me be your last disciple, and learn from you the true formula of eternal life.”

Chapter 37 - On Benevolence and Clarity (仁明)

1.

Baopuzi said, his disciples once debated which was higher - benevolence or illumination. Each clung to his view and at last came to ask me.

I said, the three celestial lights that shine above, sun, moon, and stars all belong to Heaven.

The vast earth that bears and nourishes all belongs to Earth. Heaven possesses benevolence and also illumination. Earth possesses benevolence but lacks illumination.

Thus between the high and the low there is a vast divide.

Only the sage aligns his virtue with Heaven. Therefore Emperor Yao was praised for being reverent and bright, and Confucius placed clear understanding of righteousness at the head of his teaching.

Brightness is the crown of rulers, and illumination the safeguard of the wise.

Even insects and worms possess a trace of benevolence. Their hearts are moved to nurture their young and mourn their dead, yet they fall into traps and nets without suspicion, for they have kindness but no insight.

Benevolence without illumination leads toward ruin.

It is illumination that taught men to build houses instead of nests, to cultivate grains instead of eating poisonous plants, to weave clothing instead of going naked, to make boats to cross rivers and tame beasts to carry burdens, to establish ranks to restrain disorder, to forge tools to prevent calamity, to create writing to govern officials, and to found ritual and law to refine customs.

All these are the works of illumination, not of partial benevolence.

2.

If one has benevolence in heart but lacks illumination in affairs, the nation will still fall into peril, for kindness alone cannot avert destruction.

To foresee rise and fall before they appear, to perceive danger in what seems safe, to discern subtle patterns beyond what the senses know. This is the work of illumination.

To feel compassion for living creatures, to refrain from killing or harming, to pity the trembling beast and turn aside the knife. This is the work of benevolence.

Illumination belongs to talent, benevolence belongs to conduct. To sacrifice oneself for righteousness may be done by will, but to see deeply into the hidden workings of things requires Heaven’s gift.

If one has compassion but no discernment, his mind will be confused between truth and falsehood, his spirit unable to distinguish red from white.

He will mistake evil for good and will not foresee danger. How then can he preserve his own life, much less save others?

The Duke of Zhou wept for his brother, yet executed him for rebellion. This was not lack of love but clarity of judgment. For the truly loyal, righteousness overrules affection.

In some moments one must set aside benevolence and act with illumination. Benevolence may sometimes be restrained, but illumination can never be absent.

Thus Tang and Wu seized power by force, and though their act was not gentle, they followed Heaven's will.

The enlightened see beyond appearances. But King Xu Yan ruled only with kindness, trusting others, neglecting defenses, and his kingdom was destroyed. That was the calamity of benevolence without illumination.

3.

A disciple asked, Confucius said that benevolence is a heavy burden and a long road, and that a man without benevolence cannot stand.

He also said, "Benevolence is the home of man, and righteousness its path.".

Mencius taught that compassion is the root of human nature, and the three dynasties gained or lost the world according to their benevolence.

These are the clear words of sages. Yet you, Master, praise illumination above benevolence. I confess I do not understand.

4.

Baopuzi answered, the ancients said, "To love benevolence but not study is to fall into folly." You, my disciple, are near that mistake.

When the six states contended, the world was as a den of tigers. Cunning and force prevailed, virtue and courtesy were despised.

Mencius wished to soften cruelty and revive righteousness, so he urged benevolence again and again. But nowhere did he say that benevolence surpasses illumination.

It is like in times of plague, when doctors and healers are most valued, yet no one claims that medicine exceeds the art of long life.

My discussion of benevolence and illumination was not to divide Heaven's virtues, but to clarify their roots. You use them daily and yet do not perceive them. How can you say illumination lacks proof?

In the Book of Changes it is said, "Heaven is great illumination from beginning to end.".

In Heaven's power all is encompassed. The Book of Earth says, "Great indeed is the virtue of Earth, it nourishes all things.". Thus Heaven is illumination, Earth is benevolence. Can their order be doubted?

The Book of Poetry says, "Bright, bright is Heaven above, shining upon all below. Bright, bright is the Son of Heaven, whose fame never ceases.".

The Book of Changes says, "The enlightened king receives Heaven's blessings. His illumination joins with the spirits.". Hence illumination and divinity are one. Pure benevolence alone cannot reach such height.

Confucius said, "Wise, enlightened, and valiant.". He did not say, "Benevolent and enlightened". He said, "In ancient times the enlightened kings ruled the world", not "the benevolent kings".

The Spring and Autumn Annals says, "Only the virtue of illumination is complete". The Book of Documents says, "The ruler must be bright." It does not say, "The ruler must be kind."

Laozi praised the highest sage as “clear and understanding,” but when he spoke of decline, he said, “When the Way is lost, virtue arises. When virtue is lost, benevolence arises.”

Thus illumination precedes all.

The Book of Changes again says, “The king faces south toward illumination.”. It does not say, “Faces south toward benevolence.”.

To desire benevolence is easy, for benevolence lies within human reach. But illumination belongs to the realm of Heaven. Who can command it?

Mencius said, “When one sees a child about to fall into a well, all rush to save it.”. From this we know that every man possesses compassion. But illumination, that belongs to the rare and gifted.

Even traitors and wicked men may show moments of kindness, but only the wise can unite compassion with clarity.

5.

The disciple then said, the Book of Changes teaches that the way of humanity rests upon benevolence and righteousness. If so, how can man be greater than benevolence?

Baopuzi replied, it is written so because benevolence lies in conduct, and conduct can be practiced by will. Illumination belongs to the spirit, and the spirit must be endowed by Heaven.

The sages thus taught benevolence for instruction, but illumination they left to destiny.

Chapter 38 - Broad Analogies (博喻)

1.

Baopuzi said, fullness of ten thousand measures begins from a single grain.

Lofty branches that reach the sky begin from a single hair’s breadth.

So it is that small streams gather and become the boundless southern sea, and small measures accumulate until the hidden garden touches the height of Heaven.

2.

Baopuzi said, one who drives a swift chariot lets the steeds run freely, and though their shadows are left behind they do not tire. One who rides the wind and crosses the waves passes danger without fear of overturning.

Thus Yuan Kai fulfilled his appointed office and accomplished the labors of Heaven, and Yi Yin and Lü Shang laid aside their worldly posts yet achieved the merit of revolution.

3.

Baopuzi said, a jade boat and jeweled thread are of no use for crossing rivers, and a golden bow with jade string cannot strike the target by itself.

Therefore those who are pure in conduct yet lack skill in governance are not fit to bring order to chaos, and those learned in letters yet without strategy are not fit to assist the bright ruler.

4.

Baopuzi said, the lofty wind and hidden garden are not exalted because they rise from small mounds, and black jade and green gems need no proof from lesser stones.

Thus those of heroic and uncommon spirit startle others by their fragrance like rare orchids, and those of firm and independent bearing stir echoes among all living things.

5.

Baopuzi said, ice and fire do not boast of their power to freeze or burn, and jade does not prove its worth by comparison yet its nature shines through.

Therefore the noble man keeps himself respectful and does not grieve at having few companions, and the perfected man sits like a corpse yet his heart is beyond praise and blame.

6.

Baopuzi said, the rushing wind can topple mountains but cannot pluck a single hair, and blazing fire can melt metal and stone but cannot dry a wet cloth.

So Han Xin was skilled in war but clumsy in governance, and the Marquis of Jiang secured the state yet lacked eloquence in reply.

7.

Baopuzi said, those who chase after fame do not fear to give their lives, and those who value the body do not let desire burden the heart.

Thus Ji Xin gladly burned himself to death without regret, while Yang Zhu would not trade a single hair for the wealth of a whole kingdom.

8.

Baopuzi said, a small fish cannot understand the far course of a divine dragon, and wild ducks cannot know that the swan is not their equal.

Therefore the ploughman laughs at Chen Sheng for throwing away his hoe, and the shallow-minded mock Kongming for sitting with folded knees.

9.

Baopuzi said, the sharpness of pure metal is tested upon the hide of the rhinoceros, and the quality of fine silk is proven by its use in ritual robes.

Thus when the worthy and the unworthy are placed on equal ground, Yuan Kai and a dull vessel appear no different, and when they share the same duty, the spirited steed and the tired nag seem alike.

10.

Baopuzi said, a vessel that is not a ritual cup will rush forward quickly and retreat as fast, but one whose measure equals Yi Yin and Lü Shang may begin late yet arrive early.

Therefore even the wren, weary from flight, cannot soar beyond the tops of bushes, while the young mandarin duck rises slowly yet glances upward and reaches the blue sky.

11.

Baopuzi said, when misfortune ends it is followed by prosperity, when darkness reaches its height the morning light begins to shine.

Thus the oxen that once bent their ears climbing the slopes of Wu may now race a thousand li, and the fish that once wound their scales in the deep abyss may now rise above rainbows in high flight.

12.

Baopuzi said, the broken and the scattered reveal hidden beauty, and the crushed and the fallen increase fragrance.

Therefore Guan Zhong was imprisoned in chains yet established the order that united the states, and Zhang Yi suffered humiliation yet won lasting merit in serving Qin.

13.

Baopuzi said, when one listens only to rivalry he finds small advantage but breeds hatred, when good and evil go different ways the outcome still brings connection.

Thus the ugly Maomu, covered in warts, hated to look upon the beauty of Xishi, and the jealous princes of Shang and Yan once heard of retiring farmers and sighed in envy.

14.

Baopuzi said, when the pure and the mixed meet, the slow will feel shame before the quick. When the strong and the weak stand together, the mighty will be envied by the small.

Thus Han Xin rose to greatness while the common servants grew bitter and sick with envy, and Lord Wu'an's achievements were high while Fan Sui used smooth words to undo his deeds.

15.

Baopuzi said, a fatal sickness cannot be healed without bitter medicine, rotten wood cannot take the carving of ornaments.

Therefore Bi Gan tore open his breast to prove his loyal heart, and Tian Feng foresaw disaster and was slain for his honest speech.

16.

Baopuzi said, the lonely paulownia on Yi Mountain cannot sound in sorrow without strings, and the tall bamboo of Xia cannot sing clearly without breath.

So when one's rank is low even Ji and Li cannot keep the people at peace, and when one's power is slight even Yi and Zhou cannot bring perfect order.

17.

Baopuzi said, he who climbs high must beware of the limits of height, he who crosses the deep must fear the weight of the boat.

Thus in the west Qin regretted Li Si of Shang cai, and in the east Yue lamented Wen Zhong whose pride led to ruin.

18.

Baopuzi said, hardness and softness have unchanging natures, firmness and pliancy follow their natural form.

Thus even after a hundred smeltings pure gold does not lose its essence, and though tested by danger the man of courage does not lose his right mind.

19.

Baopuzi said, if gain is sought by improper means, wealth and rank are not worth keeping. If benevolence and righteousness are abandoned, even a hundred years of life are not worth pitying.

Therefore Bian Sui carried a stone to cast himself into the river, and Zhong You gladly offered his body to the blade.

20.

Baopuzi said, the low and the high cannot be judged by one rule, abundance or scarcity cannot be used to measure virtue.

Thus Hui Shi grieved that his chariot had little to endure, and Zhuang Zhou sighed that there were too many fish to be caught.

21.

Baopuzi said, to advance and withdraw are as different as ice and fire, to be restless or calm is as opposite as flight and sinking.

Thus Mo Di, wrapped in coarse silk, found peace through endurance, and the recluse Ji Sou, by casting off the world, found delight in freedom.

22.

Baopuzi said, when hearts are in harmony affection runs deep though acquaintance be brief, when spirits are opposed estrangement grows though companionship be long.

Thus when voices agree, two strangers meet and become close as old friends, but when their ways differ, even lifelong companions find no love between them.

23.

Baopuzi said, a great ship with the prow of a heron is the best for crossing rivers, yet if steered by northern barbarians it will founder upon the waves.

A horse of fine blood with foaming sweat is the swiftest of steeds, yet if guided by one untrained in the reins it will stumble on dangerous roads.

A sword of the purest steel gleams with perfect edge, yet in unskilled hands it brings harm to its wielder.

Strong armies and sharp soldiers are divine instruments of order, yet if used by rulers without wisdom they bring their own destruction.

24.

Baopuzi said, Heaven has a fixed order and the highest honor, whoever offends against ritual meets swift and heavy punishment.

Thus on the Dark Isle even the beasts that can speak are not ranked among noble sacrifices, and the crickets that bear their own limbs may live but can never know virtue or righteousness.

25.

Baopuzi said, slander cannot be stilled by clever words, true anger cannot be soothed by empty gestures.

If one seeks to end hatred without reason or to calm resentment without justice, it is like embracing ice to escape the cold, building fires to ward off heat, chasing the light to flee from one's own shadow, or boring holes in a boat to stop the leak.

26.

Baopuzi said, a wise ruler appoints men without forcing them beyond their skill, and a loyal minister serves without exceeding his measure.

To give office without talent is folly, to assign duty beyond one's strength is ruin.

It is like filling an ice bowl with boiling water, wrapping reeds around blazing fire, hanging ten thousand weights on a rotten rope, or loading a small boat with twice its burden.

27.

Baopuzi said, the leopard's spotted fur is not worn to carry firewood, the music of the Nine Transformations is not performed for the deaf, a lofty song with distant harmony is not sung for fools, and those who forget themselves to achieve true merit do not labor for men of shallow virtue.

28.

Baopuzi said, when the people's wealth is drained and their labors never end, resentment will arise without cease.

To seek lasting peace while cutting the roots of life is to graft branches by wounding the trunk, to widen vision by carving out the eyes, and to sharpen hearing by cutting off the ears.

29.

Baopuzi said, laws should not be fixed if they hinder the right use of time, merit should not be forced by seeking novelty.

Those who constantly alter their ways to match the crowd are like trimming a tall horse to fit a low cart, cutting the ankle to fit a crooked shoe, shortening a long sword to fill a short sheath, or slicing a broad gem to fit a narrow box.

30.

Baopuzi said, the fish with glittering scales cannot leave the narrow valley, the phoenix that perches in tall trees will not nest among the ants' mounds.

The noble sayings of the Nine Divisions do not issue from the mouths of the vulgar, and the lofty calculations written on golden tablets do not arise in the minds of the common.

Seeing the branches that spread a hundredfold, one knows the root was not small.

Reading the vast writings that flow like oceans, one perceives the author's deep and boundless mind.

31.

Baopuzi said, the lush mulberry grove cannot aid the cypress in its chill austerity, and rich soil around the city cannot lift the poor man who shivers in his cloak. Yet from cocoons come silk and fine gauze that arise by their own work, and from the full granaries of the state come wealth in thousands of barns.

Therefore those who see far honor the root, while those who look near pursue only the branch.

32.

Baopuzi said, the coarse of body cling to form, the refined of spirit grasp the unseen.

Those who know the beginning and perceive the end have a thread by which to follow truth, but those who sense what is yet unborn rely not on outer things.

Thus to see Heaven and Earth by day is not true clarity, but to discern a hair's breadth in the night is unmatched brilliance.

33.

Baopuzi said, spring flowers cannot long remain bright when cut from the stem, and the great fish that swallows boats cannot live without water.

So those whose name exceeds their merit will never keep their honor, and those whose rank exceeds their virtue will surely meet disaster.

34.

Baopuzi said, those who can endure the bitterness of medicine are healed of fatal disease, those who bear the weight of armor are safe from arrows, those who hold to a strict and upright life attain excellence, and those who receive harsh but honest words are freed from confusion.

35.

Baopuzi said, when phoenixes and peacocks eat grain with barnyard fowl they suffer disgrace, when dragons and unicorns share the pen with oxen they are treated as beasts of burden.

Thus the elder of Shang hid in the mountains and preserved his noble virtue, and Bian Sui leapt into the depths to keep his pure name alive.

36.

Baopuzi said, a well left uncleared fills with mud, and fertile fields left untilled are choked with weeds.

Study without reflection breeds confusion, and discourse without precision multiplies error and wastes effort.

37.

Baopuzi said, one may hoard ten thousand pieces of gold in chests and still live like a beggar if he never spends them.

One may hold fine thoughts within his heart, yet if he never writes or speaks them, he differs no more from the dull and ordinary than treasure buried in the earth.

38.

Baopuzi said, Nanwei played the green lute and was the height of grace, yet she still adorned herself to enhance her beauty.

The disciples Hui and Xue had radiant minds, yet they still relied on the books of the ancients to broaden their wisdom.

39.

Baopuzi said, when red curtains and patterned nets are layered above, ugliness is hidden from sight. When painted lacquer and bright colors are laid upon rough wood, even the dead tree appears fair.

Thus when the Six Arts are mastered, the coarse become refined, and when praise gathers from many, the obscure are lifted among the noble.

40.

Baopuzi said, in deep forests where shade gathers, all the birds assemble, and in vast waters where darkness spreads, the fish flock together.

When virtue is great and merit wide, many hearts take refuge there. When faults are overlooked and talent recognized, those near and far will both come forth in loyalty.

41.

Baopuzi said, one may have swift feet to climb wondrous peaks, yet still be unable to leap freely across the cliffs of Lüliang.

One may swim with ease and dive to the depths, yet fail to mount the heights or grasp the steep.

Li Zhu could split a hair with an arrow from a hundred paces, yet could not tell noble from base in music.

Ziye could master the perfect tone of the spirit, yet could not distinguish black from white before his eyes.

42.

Baopuzi said, when the four senses are opened wide, the sun's light is gathered into harmony.

When the mind is emptied and made vast, even small streams will flow to it.

Thus when understanding is broad, all voices are heard.

When the courtyard torch burns bright, worthy men come forth. When the wood of criticism is erected, every fault becomes known. When the drum of admonition is hung, honest words are freely spoken.

43.

Baopuzi said, all who speak well praise Yao, yet his government was not perfect.

All who speak ill condemn Jie, yet his rule was not without merit. A single withered branch does not mar the fullness of a great forest, and weeds growing in winter cannot stop the season's frost.

The beauty of Xishi is not lessened by her few faults, for her beauty is abundant, and the ugliness of Maomu is not redeemed by her small virtues, for her ugliness is deep.

44.

Baopuzi said, body and name seldom flourish together, achievement and spirit rarely remain whole.

Those who divide their virtue endure hardship yet find peace, while those who bend themselves to suit the world enjoy ease but invite danger.

Fierce birds that strike their prey are soon caged, gentle birds that sing with wit are favored for a while.

Beautiful jade is cut and polished for ornament, while iron tools of the same ore are worn away in labor.

Fragrant orchids are clipped for their scent, and fine timber is felled for its sound.

Thus the bright dragon rises to the clouds when it changes, and the sacred phoenix returns to its crimson nest when the world turns dull.

Ziyong sighed at the greatness of Heaven's kinship, and the hermit of Qiyuan wept for the sacrifice dressed in embroidered silk.

45.

Baopuzi said, when ten thousand deer lower their horns, even the tiger holds its fangs.

When a thousand birds gather in flocks, even the eagle bends its claws.

Thus when four kingdoms spread rumors, the Duke of Zhou could not still them. When slander filled the roads, Zi Chan could not silence it.

46.

Baopuzi said, the beauty of Wei's consort is beyond all paints and powders, and the balance of Heaven's two seasons cannot be altered by breath or wind.

Thus those who hold vast talent need no show of style to prove distinction, and those whose nature transcends the vulgar need no small praise to win acceptance.

47.

Baopuzi said, rare creatures like fish with scales of light suffer because they are few, while foxes and owls are hated because they are many.

Thus when the court is filled with worthy men, rulers still seek more. When flatterers hold power, the upright grind their teeth in anger.

48.

Baopuzi said, great strength is not confined to Meng Ben or Wu Huo, beauty is not limited to Zheng Dan or Mao Qiang, swift motion is not held only by fine steeds, nor sharpness only by master blades.

Thus one who can build a just kingdom need not be from Lu, and one who can spread kindness to all need not be from the west of the land.

49.

Baopuzi said, when the phoenix sings at dawn it brings no profit to the world, yet all listen in stillness.

When the owl cries by night it causes no harm, yet all stop their ears in fear.

Thus good words spread joy no matter how far they travel, and evil words bring offense even at the nearest distance.

The sun and moon never lose their brightness by rising each day, but a bent arrow is soon forgotten once it has flown.

50.

Baopuzi said, shadow never leaves its form, and a name never departs from its truth.

The river that turns its back on its source cannot long flow eastward, and the flower that blooms out of season cannot shine beneath frost and snow.

51.

Baopuzi said, beasts with fanged jaws inspire fear even when crouched low, and insects that wield the axe's bite may have no form yet still seem fierce.

Thus the gentleman, though clothed in coarse garments and pressed by poverty, cannot be treated lightly, and the petty man, though wearing robes and crown, cannot be held in true esteem.

52.

Baopuzi said, the blessed unicorn roams beyond the outer wastes and suffers no snare, the bright crane soars upon the high peaks and escapes the hunter's net.

Why must one hide in crooked dens in constant fear, or clutch reeds with trembling heart?

Those who serve at the table of rulers are cherished while fattened, and those who are cooked in the pot are the same who once stood in the courtyard.

53.

Baopuzi said, the wise treasure reason, for it preserves the echoes of the ancients and reveals the rise and fall of the ages.

The enlightened value discernment, for it shines amid hardship and draws forth instruments that can save the world.

To seek the counsel of common men on the harmonies of Heaven is not the clear hearing of Yan.

To ask the judgment of the jealous upon the worth of the noble is to consult the fox about how to mend one's fur.

54.

Baopuzi said, the phoenix and the qilin endure hunger and thirst in the wilderness rather than rest in the kitchens of men.

The celestial horses and yellow deer suffer hunger in desolation yet refuse the feed of royal stables.

Thus the man who catches cicadas in fragrant woods forgets the world, and the fisherman who casts his line in the southern waters will not stoop to grasp a jade seal.

55.

Baopuzi said, when wills are united mountains and seas are not far, when hearts diverge even a single step becomes distance.

Thus some travel far yet meet in spirit, while others dwell nearby yet never touch.

56.

Baopuzi said, the brilliance of embroidered robes is not the work of one color alone, the height of Mount Tai is not built by one spade of earth.

Thus when the nine ministers fulfilled their duties, the realm was stable and bright, and when the four teachers received their charge, the empire's mandate was secured.

57.

Baopuzi said, the green-scaled dragon flies through Heaven without wings, the serpent of mist glides like lightning without feet, the turtle hears across valleys without ears, and the worm makes sound without a mouth.

Thus Gao Yao, though mute, equaled the eloquent, and Jin Ye, though blind, saw as clearly as Li Zhu.

58.

Baopuzi said, men of high rank are not always fit for their place, and those of fair fame may not deserve their praise.

The saw's teeth cannot chew, the bellows' mouth cannot taste, the ear of a jar cannot discern music, the nose of a shoe cannot sense fragrance, the eye of a pot cannot gaze at the moon, and the leg of a bed cannot walk a single step.

59.

Baopuzi said, a traveler who cannot draw the bow may still know the archer's mark, and one who cannot play the lute may yet judge its harmony.

Thus there are those who cannot play chess yet discern victory at a glance, and others who cannot pluck the zither yet understand the tones of Zheng and Ya as they pass the ear.

60.

Baopuzi said, rivers that flood the plains arise from high mountains, and waters that cover the hills are born from deep springs.

Great works of the age come from unmatched instruments, and plans that restore the fallen are born from hearts that transcend the world.

In the lairs of worms there are no feathers fit for the wind, and in the ditches and gullies there are no gems that glow at night.

61.

Baopuzi said, the fierce wind that burns chariot wheels only feeds the blaze of greater fire, yet the glowworm's light is quenched by it.

The sweet rain that nourishes life makes the trees flourish, yet when it falls upon dead wood it hastens decay.

Grand chariots with jeweled wheels are treasures for noble men, yet when thieves ride them they bring their own ruin.

Fine food in golden bowls is the reward of loyal service, yet when given to the unworthy it becomes the cause of downfall.

62.

Baopuzi said, the hide of the rhinoceros is cut to make armor for the ranks of war, the feathers of kingfishers are plucked for the crowns of queens.

Though drawn from deep valleys and raised to lofty places, for these two creatures it would have been better to dwell safely in the wilds.

Thus the divine turtle prefers to drag its tail in the mud rather than lie polished in a box, and the pheasant of the marsh delights in ten steps of freedom rather than suffer the fate of the hen and the duck.

63.

Baopuzi said, one gift of talent is not enough to serve every purpose, one strength alone cannot benefit all.

The cock knows the hour of dawn yet cannot measure the path of the stars, the swan knows midnight but cannot reckon the length of day, the mountain dove foresees rain and shine yet knows not Heaven's chart, and the creeping snake does not know where the hidden springs lie beneath the earth.

64.

Baopuzi said, when decrees are unclear, harsh punishments are used to quiet disorder.

When strategy fails, the army is driven to invade neighbors.

It is like striking at locusts with plowshares, or chopping trees to kill insects, eating poison to cure lice, or tearing down a house to chase away sparrows.

65.

Baopuzi said, sharp blades are forged from dull stone, bright fire springs from dark wood, precious pearls grow within humble shells, and fine jade lies hidden in rough rock.

Therefore one cannot measure Yao by his father or judge Wu by his ancestors, for greatness is born from what seems least.

66.

Baopuzi said, when purpose is fulfilled the face is calm, when intent is lost the countenance is troubled.

When the root decays the branches wither, when the source is shallow the stream runs short. What lies within will surely show without, what begins near will be known afar.

67.

Baopuzi said, forms and colors may differ yet all can please the heart, tones of metal and string may vary yet all delight the ear, nets and traps may differ in shape yet all can catch prey, and ways of merit and fame may differ in path yet all are valued alike.

68.

Baopuzi said, abundance often invites harm, and beauty often draws misfortune.

Thus the southern bird perishes for its bright feathers, and the spotted leopard dies for its patterned skin.

When fish and deer multiply the ponds and forests are ruined, when gold and jade abound robbers soon arrive, when rank and honor grow high care and danger increase with them.

69.

Baopuzi said, when the northern wind chills the night the fan and gauze are cast aside, when climbing the steep mountain the light boat is left behind, when war arises the scholar withdraws, and when peace returns the soldier is dismissed.

70.

Baopuzi said, a thing worth ten thousand gold is known as precious before it is seen, and a tree whose branches embrace one another is known as great before it is measured.

Thus when we behold a wave that touches the sky we know it did not spring from a muddy pool, and when we see a writing vast in spirit we know it was not born from those who cling to mere phrases.

71.

Baopuzi said, red blossoms and green herbs are not bound to crooked roots, purple fungus grows fragrant even in barren soil.

Thus those who receive Heaven’s jade to seal their merit may be born among the guilty, and those who bear the Mandate through the rites of their ancestors may come from rough and noisy homes.

72.

Baopuzi said, when good words are spoken at home their echo reaches far, but when one’s deeds are crooked even those nearby turn away.

Thus the state of Song saw fire in its minister’s house, and the court of Yin knew rebellion within its walls.

Trouble may rise from beyond the borders, yet ruin begins within the hall.

73.

Baopuzi said, Jing Ke and Zhu Hai would not show their courage among the timid, Meng Ben and Feng Fu would not brandish their weapons among common men.

Great scholars do not debate trivial matters with the shallow, and wise men do not waste their insight in the company of the vulgar.

74.

Baopuzi said, bowing and courtesy are not the armor for battle, and helmets and mail are not the attire of the court.

The long sash and hanging seal are not for brandishing blades, and measured steps and straight lines are not the way to fight fire or rescue the drowning.

75.

Baopuzi said, Heaven and Earth nurture all things without their knowing, because their blessings have no limit.

The great man transforms the world without the people perceiving it, because his work is done before disorder begins.

What can be known is small, and what is easily measured is rare.

76.

Baopuzi said, the ladies E Ying and Ren Si were not famed for weaving silk, and Tang, Wu, and the Emperor Gao of Han were not praised for small deeds.

Those who gaze upon the three celestial lights have no time to peer into the well, and those who listen to the music of Shao cannot stoop to hear the songs of the mulberry field.

77.

Baopuzi said, the outward form does not reveal the heart, and appearance cannot measure worth.

Confucius looked like a weary stray dog, the Duke of Zhou seemed rough like uncarved wood, Gao Yao's face was dark and heavy, Yi Yin's body was lean and dry, yet they shone like the brightest jade among clay figures, as brocade lies hidden beneath dust and ash.

78.

Baopuzi said, glory and honor cannot change the foolish, so virtue does not pass to sons.

Vice and shame cannot corrupt the wise, so evil does not stain the truly good.

79.

Baopuzi said, even the greatest cannot alter what is fixed by Heaven, and the smallest cannot destroy what is truly whole. Frost and snow cannot wither the strength of millet and wheat, nor blazing summer melt the frozen peaks.

Storm winds cannot stir the depths of hidden springs, and gentle rains cannot bring life to dead weeds.

The jewels that bleed light must be polished upon the firmest stone, the fine blades of Shenlu and Menglao must be ground upon the whetstone of Chu.

The steeds of noble breed await a worthy master to show their strength, and fine natures await cultivation to reveal their virtue.

80.

Baopuzi said, the phoenix and the crane, though hungry and thirsty, will not rest in the kitchen of men, the heavenly stag and the yellow horse, though weary and lost, will not feed upon the hay of mortal stables.

Thus the old man who catches cicadas forgets the world in fragrant woods, and the fisherman who casts his line in southern waters will not trade his stillness for a courtly feast.

81.

Baopuzi said, round and square differ in shape, motion and stillness end in the same return.

Thus Heaven is honored for its strength, and Earth is esteemed for its stillness.

The seven luminaries and the four seasons circle to complete their work, the five mountains and six pillars stand to hold the world firm.

Therefore the men of Song and Mo labored with haste to save their states, while those of Hu Ming and Ganmu governed through stillness and balance.

82.

Baopuzi said, those who find joy in seclusion live in hardship yet keep their spirits whole, those who toil to aid the world rest their bodies yet weary their hearts.

The one who waters his garden with a clay jar is happier than the grand minister in his hall, the one who eats roots and herbs in the mountains finds beauty in his plain meal, the one who leaves his land with a staff shines in winter's moonlight, and the one who waits through the night for dawn loses health through his anxious labor.

83.

Baopuzi said, between benevolence and cruelty there is a gulf as vast as Heaven, yet between good and evil there is still a faint line.

The unicorn steps lightly to avoid harm, but the wolf hides in shadows to destroy life.

Minister Yu cast away his seal to save the poor, Lord Hua resigned his office to raise the worthy.

Li Si envied the talent of Han Fei and killed him, Pang Juan feared to be surpassed and mutilated Sun Bin.

84.

Baopuzi said, when one draws out the strength of each man none will be wasted, but when one presses only their faults all will be in vain.

Light silk and fine gauze are beautiful in dress yet cannot resist arrows, the great swords of Shenlu are excellent for battle yet cannot sew or carve.

Every thing has its proper use, and each man his fitting way.

85.

Baopuzi said, a small flaw does not ruin a great vessel, a brief illness does not destroy long virtue.

The sun and moon, though blemished by spots and shadows, still shine over Heaven, and the Yellow River, though muddy with silt, still flows over mountains.

Thus we do not reject Guan Zhong for his theft, nor despise Xiao He for losing his fields, nor condemn Zhang Liang for taking another's wife, nor reproach Chen Ping for accepting gold, for their virtue outweighed their faults.

86.

Baopuzi said, the tiger and leopard cannot hunt upon the waves, and the serpent cannot climb when the air is clear.

In catching pheasants and hares, the phoenix cannot match the hawk, and in pulling the plow, dragons cannot rival oxen.

Therefore warriors and men of strength are of little use in peaceful times, and scholars of great thought are not prized in an age of conflict.

87.

Baopuzi said, when two steeds are tied together, the swift and the slow move as one, when the ape is caged, it becomes as dull as a raccoon, when a sword is sheathed, it is as blunt as lead, when a sage is forced to low office, he seems no greater than the common man.

To seek a thousand-mile gallop from a horse in chains, or demand the merit of a sage from a petty official, cannot be called wisdom.

88.

Baopuzi said, those who abandon the bitter herb will never know the taste of sweetness, those who discard jade for gravel will never know the worth of treasure.

Those who scorn the perfection of the Ninefold Hall and delight in the vulgar music of the frontier cannot rise to the harmony of the divine, those who forsake the noble and cling to the base cannot bring order to the world or peace to the people.

89.

Baopuzi said, those who understand the law of rise and fall do not grieve in misfortune, and those who see the working of destiny do not rejoice in success.

When one is pressed in the deep pool, he lets go the heart of resentment, when one shines in purple robes, he keeps no trace of pride. He who thrice serves and thrice retires is a man of true balance.

90.

Baopuzi said, fortune and decline follow the turns of fate, and wealth or poverty cannot define a man.

Gain and loss depend on right timing, and shame or honor cannot measure ability.

Fate cannot be seized by effort, nor opportunity changed by cleverness.

Thus the great marshal Jiang Ziya was once an old man cast off by his wife, Han Xin a beggar who went hungry, Xiao He a minor clerk of no fame, and Ying Bu a branded criminal.

When the dragon hides among snakes and the phoenix folds its wings among sparrows, the world may mistake the noble for the low, yet Heaven knows their kind.

91.

Baopuzi said, when men are rightly used, the world has no waste.

When one knows his own use, he is never lost.

To govern through others' ability is the use of men; to preserve one's nature untouched is the use of oneself.

Thus those who serve for fame do not disturb their harmony, and those who cultivate life do not let things weigh upon them.

92.

Baopuzi said, when one measures ability before giving office, he asks no miracles beyond the tool's strength.

When one knows his own limits before accepting, he feels no blame when power is spent.

He who extinguishes a candle need not drain the sea, and he who carries a few pounds need not call on the giant Wu Huo.

To carry firewood or salt does not require the feet of a thousand-li horse, to bear trifling duties does not call upon the worth of the rare and solitary sage.

93.

Baopuzi said, a small stream cannot float a great ship, and a cup cannot hold a thousand measures of grain.

Dim light cannot reveal the stars' true brilliance, and common talent cannot discern the greatness of the exceptional.

All that Heaven gives has its source, and the roots of wisdom are planted deep.

94.

Baopuzi said, the men of Ying found beauty in vulgar songs, and despised the harmony of the Six Modes.

The common fool delights in sweet words, yet rejects the wise rule that profits him.

Thus Song Yu left behind the clear tones of pure music, and the wise prefer the counsel that pierces error.

95.

Baopuzi said, mountains of jade cannot exist without flawed stones, and forests of a thousand li cannot grow without crooked trees.

When we speak of treasures we should not cast them aside for small blemishes, when we speak of greatness we should not discard it for minor faults.

Zhang Liang plotted rebellion yet brought peace to his lord, Peng Yue once led bandits yet built immortal merit in founding the state.

96.

Baopuzi said, the Five Sacred Mountains rise high and are not lessened by hidden faults, the vast ocean stretches boundless and is not stained by its mud.

Thus the nine virtues gather followers through their broadness, and Confucius won hearts by his open love for all.

Chapter 39 - Expansive Parables (廣譬)

1.

Baopuzi said, to establish virtue, to fulfill one's word, and to live in purity is already wealth, what need is there for piles of jade and silk?

To raise one's purpose high, never lowering oneself to shame, is already honor, what need is there for robes of blue and purple?

Common people cannot measure such greatness, and the mediocre cannot weigh its worth.

This is true height, not because one walks among clouds or treads upon rainbows.

Those who inquire cannot fathom its depth, those who seek cannot find its limit.

This is true depth, not because one plunges into rivers or seas.

When the four seas are complete, even a poor house hung with chimes has no envy toward those who smelt mountains or boil the ocean.

Dwelling among beasts and birds, one may feel no thirst for painted carriages or jeweled wheels.

2.

Baopuzi said, the hidden spirit awaits the auspicious cloud before it ascends, the great swan relies on strong wind to soar in emptiness, the pale-scaled fish leaps when the concubine strums her zither, the white pheasant comes when the Duke of Zhou appears.

The old man of Qi met the Western Lord and cast his line at Pan Stream, Han Ying met the High Emperor and displayed his talent to bring order to chaos.

3.

Baopuzi said, one who clarifies his spirit within the mysterious One forgets his form, one who elevates his conduct beyond external things abandons wealth and rank.

Thus Zhi Li, though deformed, rejoiced in creation and smiled with peace, and Ji Sou of the north, dwelling in Song Mountain, found contentment in his retreat.

4.

Baopuzi said, coarse reason cannot reach completion, and skill cannot master all things.

The bright image can still be obscured, rivers and mountains may shift, metal and jade though hard can be made pliant, dense ice can still be split apart.

The Duke of Zhou could not climb the heights of Mount Yun with Bo Yi, nor could Confucius match Lü Liang in diving into a hundred-fathom stream.

5.

Baopuzi said, thunder cannot temper its sound to match the harmony of bells, the sun and moon cannot limit their light to soften their rays, great rivers cannot shorten their banks to meet the wish for speed, the Five Peaks cannot lower themselves to suit the climber’s ease.

Thus the broad cart cannot narrow its wheels to fit a narrow road, nor can the noble man bend his conduct to match the vulgar crowd.

Yin and Yang nurture all things with vastness, the Three Lights shine on all, Song and Hua Mountains conceal faults and yet are grand, the Northern Sea holds impurities and yet is vast.

The great scholar broadens the Way for others, and the far-reaching sage embraces the world with love.

6.

Baopuzi said, the sacred turtle's shell is not meant for war, the unicorn's horn and the phoenix's talon are not meant for combat.

Thus the wise man does not cast away his sword in times of peace, and the watchman does not abandon vigilance even when the world is at rest.

7.

Baopuzi said, southern gold does not despise itself though buried deep, and jade does not lose its purity though hidden from sight.

The man who follows the Way does not change his path through misfortune, and the man who guards righteousness does not bend himself for empty praise.

8.

Baopuzi said, one who climbs the heavenly garden knows the smallness of the hills, one who sails the great sea sees the narrowness of ponds.

Only after studying the Nine Canons does one perceive the wall of ignorance, only after hearing the Supreme Way does one know the delusions of the common world.

9.

Baopuzi said, the source of chaos has no clear current, a hair's root bears no embracing branches, a spark cannot spread wide flame, a crevice cannot host a forest, a crooked form has no straight shadow, and confusion at the top leaves no order below.

10.

Baopuzi said, if one has never seen the glow of jade, one does not know the worthlessness of pebbles.

If one has never seen the grace of tiger and leopard, one cannot know the dullness of sheep and dogs.

Only after hearing the nine movements of White Snow can one realize the crudeness of the songs of Ba, and only after meeting the learned and refined can one lament the ignorance of the unlearned.

11.

Baopuzi said, a flawless jade bowl that serves no purpose is inferior to a clay vessel that can be used, a brocade torn in inches is not as good as plain cloth that endures.

The rude woman of Xia, though rich, was less noble than the pure outcast, and those rich in sin are not as good as the poor who keep the Way.

12.

Baopuzi said, fierce beasts do not strike beyond their measure, hawks do not flap their wings in vain.

When one schemes beyond virtue within the temple, and strives beyond strength in the field, it is like a feather cast into the furnace, or snow dropped into boiling water.

The fungus that lives one morning cannot test the steel of a great sword, nor can the lamb challenge the tiger in its den.

13.

Baopuzi said, when the three lights are veiled in the sky, the world below grows dim, when the root withers here, the branches weaken there, when the Way is lost nearby, disaster reaches afar, when government falters above, the people suffer below.

14.

Baopuzi said, those who focus on the distant often lose the near, and those who guard the outer neglect the inner.

One who covers his head cannot ensure his feet stay dry, one who shields his belly cannot ensure his back is safe.

Thus the First Emperor built walls to hold the Hu, yet ruin rose within his tent, and Emperor Wu hung banners across a thousand miles, yet rebellion began within his halls.

15.

Baopuzi said, talent has no fixed value, and tools no single way.

The straight man is prized when the age desires uprightness, the subtle man when the time calls for cunning.

When frost forms, the mirrors of water are still, when heat rises, the furs and braziers retreat.

When high birds gather, good bows are drawn, when cunning hares abound, the hounds are set loose.

When war comes, warriors thrive, and when the music of peace is played, the scholars rise.

16.

Baopuzi said, a river that feeds the sea cannot abandon its source, a tree that blooms cannot forsake its roots.

When the source fails, the stream dries, when the root is lost, the branches wither.

To abandon the sages and defy the classics is to lose the means of greatness.

17.

Baopuzi said, the four great rivers have separate springs and the five streams their different paths, yet all flow to the sea.

Colors differ yet all are beautiful, tones diverge yet all can move the heart, fragrances vary yet all may delight, and flavors differ yet all may please.

18.

Baopuzi said, men value the ornament of things rather than their use, and change the people with empty talk rather than with virtue.

Yet coarse cloth can ward off cold without need of fur, and pure simplicity can shape the world without ornate words.

When clear wind stirs, even mountain peaks align, when just rule spreads, the people follow in harmony.

There has never been a time when a humble ruler was despised and the world was poor, or when a ruler prized virtue and the people were low.

19.

Baopuzi said, a small cause may bring a great result, and near order may yield distant peace.

A shallow pool may draw fish from the deep, a thriving grove may call phoenixes from afar, a pattern carved upon a vessel may invite dragons from the heavens, and ashes cast into water may summon the moon’s reflection.

Thus Duke Wen of Jin turned the wheel for a wounded insect and warriors came in multitudes, King Goujian bent himself before a frog’s croak and his soldiers fought to the death.

When the signs are shown, the virtuous respond, when the bones are buried, compassion still reaches them.

20.

Baopuzi said, fertile soil gives life to withered leaves, and the virtuous body reforms the common world without speech.

The Tang kings wore deerskin and attained peace, Duke Huan cast away purple silks and ended extravagance.

When the palace of Zhang Hua grew too rich, disaster followed. When the terrace of King Xuan was abandoned, the silent way prevailed.

21.

Baopuzi said, the wise discern rise and fall from the faint echo of forgotten songs, the enlightened see destiny in what is still without form.

Thus the man of Yue saw Duke Huan's illness before it appeared, and Ji Zi foresaw the fall of Yin in the king's ivory chopsticks.

22.

Baopuzi said, Heaven and Earth cannot abandon the cycle of seasons and still complete the year, and a wise ruler cannot forsake law and virtue and still attain order.

Punishing the noble establishes authority, rewarding the humble encourages goodness.

When punishment reaches the high, corruption is broken and the weak cannot misuse it.

When kindness touches the low, distant people draw near and the miserly cannot prevent it.

23.

Baopuzi said, one who sails the vast sea must study the winds to gain safe passage, one who governs must be cautious in gain and loss to secure lasting peace.

What the foolish ruler neglects, the wise ruler treasures, what a ruined kingdom casts away, a thriving age upholds.

24.

Baopuzi said, a small misstep in the mechanism can throw off the arrow's aim, an error in granting or taking can turn good into chaos.

When right and wrong are confused, order collapses, when merit and fault are unmeasured, the state falls.

The enlightened ruler grants rewards like spring rain without excess, and enacts punishments like autumn frost without cruelty.

25.

Baopuzi said, one who understands justice cannot be deceived, one who holds to law cannot be swayed by affection.

To gain others, one must first be whole within. To lose others, one must first be lost within.

None have ever gained others while losing themselves, or lost themselves while gaining others.

26.

Baopuzi said, a wise ruler holds both power and grace in his own hands, not giving others the tool of command.

The foolish ruler entrusts weapons to others, and though his name is high, his strength departs.

To control reward and gather hearts was how Tian Chang seized Qi.

To wield power and monopolize the court was how Wang Mang usurped Han.

27.

Baopuzi said, fixed rules cannot meet all change, one path cannot answer every need.

You cannot mark a sword's loss by carving a boat, nor tune the zither with glue upon the strings.

The parasol is not used in clear weather, nor the red wheel for crossing rivers.

When the taste is bland, add salt. When the pot overflows, add water and reduce the fire.

28.

Baopuzi said, golden charters and blood oaths cannot prevent deceit if men's hearts break promises, and the ancient method of tying cords cannot bind them again.

Harsh punishments and bloody wars cannot end greed if hearts are corrupt.

Thus the Book of Documents teaches reverence through generations, and the Book of Changes instructs adjustment with the times.

29.

Baopuzi said, one who knows true reality cannot be deceived by falsehood, one who sees deep cannot be tricked by shallow things. Otherwise, one would mistake snakes for dragons and owls for phoenixes.

30.

Baopuzi said, the world praises what echoes the crowd, yet the praised are not always virtuous.

It condemns with noise and anger, yet the condemned are not always wicked.

Thus, instead of agreeing or rejecting by rumor, test their deeds and measure their use.

Then flatterers cannot rise by empty words, nor can true talent be dismissed for weakness.

The unworthy will no longer ride in grand chariots, and the noble will race forth like lightning.

How could great merit then fail to stand, or the Way fail to be reached?

31.

Baopuzi said, decayed wood cannot withstand the wind that topples mountains, a crumbling cliff cannot survive the waves that touch the sky.

The seven hundred years of Zhou and thirty generations of its kings were not born from one battle at Muye, nor were the defeats at the Deer Terrace caused by one morning in Jiazi.

Their strength was long in decline, and their fall long prepared.

32.

Baopuzi said, people often prize what is distant and scorn what is near, trusting what they hear and doubting what they see.

Thus the King of Qin sighed at Han Fei's writings yet never understood the man, Emperor Wu admired Sima Xiangru's words yet could not live in harmony with his spirit.

When they finally met, one was executed by slander, another dismissed in neglect.

This was like Duke Ye, who loved the likeness of a dragon but turned pale when the real one appeared.

33.

Baopuzi said, a gem that does not shine is no different from gravel, and a hidden dragon that cannot fly is like a worm.

A fine horse that never neighs is mistaken for the mute, a great talent suppressed is taken for the mediocre.

Thus the eel and loach mock the red dragon in muddy waters, and the dull horse disrespects the steed in the field, for they know not the stillness that sets them apart or the motion that divides their kind.

34.

Baopuzi said, if gold and jade were cast upon the road, travelers would halt in wonder, and if silks were thrown into the mud, all would gasp in awe.

Yet when the noble are left among the vulgar, and men of state cast aside in low places, none cry for their loss.

Some admire their words yet forget their worth, others use their plans yet ignore their merit.

This disease of neglect has been long in the world.

35.

Baopuzi said, unless the source is deep as a mountain’s heart, no stream can flood the valley, unless the peak touches the sky, no clouds will form and rain.

If wealth is not abundant, kindness cannot be wide, if talent is not vast, words cannot be rich.

To see a towering tusk, one knows it grew from a tiny mouth, to see a tree that reaches the clouds, one knows it rose from a seed no larger than a hair.

36.

Baopuzi said, the phoenix rises from the crimson cave at dawn and rests upon the sacred hill at dusk, circling the heavens within a day, gliding through the winds without pause.

Such is possible only by the power of its six light feathers. So too, a great talent and a grand vessel are the six wings of a state.

37.

Baopuzi said, the musician of Qi could not move hearts without strings, and the dust of the zither could not stir sound without the instrument.

So virtue, though pure and lofty, cannot achieve its work before the time is ripe.

38.

Baopuzi said, red and green weeds do not bloom on dry branches, mighty rivers do not spring from exhausted wells.

A firefly's brief light cannot reveal all forms, and one whose heart is bound to gain and power cannot spread the fragrance of virtue.

39.

Baopuzi said, a deep pool that does not reach the earth cannot contain dragons, a high mountain that does not reach the heavens cannot summon clouds.

If virtue does not transcend the world, fame will not endure, if purpose does not stand apart from the crowd, great works cannot be achieved.

Yet common men hope to sow grain in the morning and reap in the evening, as if planting millet and expecting a harvest while they sit.

40.

Baopuzi said, one whose conduct lacks a noble mark cannot expect the praise of the ages, one whose nature lacks true cultivation cannot gather friends of virtue.

To seek honor and renown among the sages while forming shallow circles of self-interest is like lifting one's robe to cross the sea, or stretching one's hand to leap across the heavens.

41.

Baopuzi said, a dragon of clay, though painted with bright colors, cannot summon auspicious clouds, a carved bird, though gilt and polished, cannot rise upon the wind, and a straw dog, though decked in jewels, cannot leap with shadowed grace.

In the same way, those of shallow talent who gain favor and wealth cannot bring balance to heaven and earth.

42.

Baopuzi said, when poison lies hidden, nearby rats gnaw their own entrails, when a bright flame burns in the night, insects gather and die.

Rich feasts fill the cauldrons, but small talents burdened with great tasks bleed tears.

The warning of Sang and Huo is grave, and the lesson of Fan and Shu is clear.

43.

Baopuzi said, the great sea raises waves for a thousand miles, yet cannot lift the dust of a mountain peak, a fierce wind topples trees by the cliff, yet cannot uproot the weakest grass.

The tiger's roar shakes the forest, yet does not frighten the gnat, and a genius that towers above the age cannot always find harmony with the common world.

44.

Baopuzi said, a steadfast will is the lord of all achievement, diligence the teacher of every virtue.

He who climbs a mountain without fear of hardship will reach its summit, and he who does good without complaint in poverty will preserve his noble name.

45.

Baopuzi said, though the heron does not live forever, it still saves lives through its healing stone, and though the scholar may live poor and low, his books and rites still lead men toward virtue.

Sowing may not always bring harvest, yet one must still plant; the righteous may meet misfortune, yet virtue must still be done.

46.

Baopuzi said, when the burden is too great, the boat will sink, when one advances without knowing when to withdraw, the body is endangered.

Cutting the roots while feeding the branches may seem safe for a time, but collapse surely follows.

47.

Baopuzi said, dark clouds move to form the dragon's flight, yet they cannot be summoned by flies and worms, fierce winds awaken tigers, yet they cannot be raised by foxes and jackals.

Thus when great destiny calls, heroes arise, and when jade and silk are offered, the hermits of the hills emerge.

48.

Baopuzi said, gold is broken by its hardness, water endures by its softness, mountains fall because they stand too high, valleys rest in peace because they lie low.

Therefore those who hold to the yielding way escape the strife of the strong, and those who exalt others too often invite resentment.

49.

Baopuzi said, Han Xin endured crawling beneath a man’s legs without losing his tiger gaze, and Zhang Liang hid his brilliance in menial tasks without dimming his phoenix flight.

One became a ruler in the south, the other a minister of the throne. To bend and rise at the right time is like a light feather rising through the void, and to yield and extend at the right moment is how great talent waits for its age.

50.

Baopuzi said, the firefly’s small glow cannot move the great sea, a hair’s weight cannot stir a bell of a thousand pounds.

Thus Zhuangzi lamented the carpenter who left his axe, and Bo Yi grieved that the lute strings were cut.

Weak voices cannot produce great harmony, and small power cannot change the mind that rests in stillness.

51.

Baopuzi said, bears and leopards do not compete for speed with foxes, golden eagles do not fight for prey with small hawks.

Thus Zhang Er hid his strength as a gatekeeper, and Zhu Hai concealed his courage as a butcher, yet their valor was not diminished.

52.

Baopuzi said, fish are lured by fragrant bait, tigers are trapped in hidden cages.

What cannot be caught by hook and line must be dragons, what cannot be snared by trap and net must be phoenixes and unicorns.

53.

Baopuzi said, those who soar among clouds do not understand the troubles of living in the mud, those who dwell in wealth rarely pity the labor of the humble.

When roots decay, no tree can stay green for long, and when resentment grows among the people, even Yao and Shun cannot preserve lasting peace.

54.

Baopuzi said, wood that takes root in sacred soil is spared the axe, and fish that swim in the dragon pool rest free of the net.

When a gnat lands upon an eagle’s head, even small birds dare not strike, when a mouse lives beside a tiger, cats and dogs dare not stare.

55.

Baopuzi said, the divine tortoise speaks nothing, yet reveals fortune and misfortune without form, the spring frog croaks loudly, yet brings only annoyance to the ear.

Thus quiet voices often carry great power, and few words bring lasting trust.

56.

Baopuzi said, those who sit cross-legged despise the bowing of the courteous, and those who go bare-headed mock the beauty of the cap.

Therefore, in an age ruled by slander, the upright are cast aside, and among coarse men of low taste, the refined are not accepted.

57.

Baopuzi said, a cup of water cannot cool a burning marsh, a handful of earth cannot block the boiling torrent, a short blade cannot cut through a forest of tall trees, and a single voice cannot stop the discord of factions.

58.

Baopuzi said, a thousand sheep cannot resist one tiger, ten thousand sparrows cannot confront a single hawk.

A hundred torches at once cannot match the last ray of the sun, nor can a hundred drums compare to the echo of thunder.

Thus the crowd of common men cannot restore order, but one noble spirit can root stability deep in all things.

59.

Baopuzi said, success gained without right measure is like flowers blooming in winter, failure met while holding to the Way is like bamboo and pine enduring frost. The wise who see through fortune and misfortune do not lose their nature even when pressed by danger, nor bend their hearts to suit the times.

60.

Baopuzi said, thunder roars through heaven, yet cannot reach the deaf ear, sunlight fills the world, yet cannot enter a dark ravine.

Ice may chill the world, yet cannot wither the winter flower, blazing heat may burn the stones, yet cannot destroy the oak upon the hill. True virtue, once formed, cannot be moved.

61.

Baopuzi said, a drawn bow and a strung crossbow are perilous, the sharp arrow upon the string must be feared, yet the brave pheasant strikes it without hesitation.

In a corrupt state where justice is lost and rulers are darkened, even though danger looms unseen, the greedy rush forward and will not turn back.

So swift disaster arrives unawares, and ruin falls before they awaken. What pleases the foolish brings sorrow to the wise, and what the common pursue is what the sage abandons.

62.

Baopuzi said, when the wind never ceases, fans are forgotten, when the sun never sets, candles lose their light, when flowers never fall, fruit will not form, when cliffs do not erode, valleys cannot fill.

When the realm is at peace, the merits of Han and Bai are hidden, when rulers follow one another in order, the fame of Yi and Huo is dim.

Thus only in sickness do people honor the physician, and only in chaos do they value the loyal and upright.

63.

Baopuzi said, the love of fame makes men crave praise, the fear of shame makes them loathe criticism.

But those who know the unity of all things, whose nature accords with Heaven’s rhythm, see no binding in love or hate, and no loss or gain can disturb their harmony.

64.

Baopuzi said, he who gives and takes without clouding his spirit is the purest of men, he whom profit and loss cannot stain is the most refined.

His greatness cannot be measured by cup or scale, his depth cannot be reached by a single step.

Rare sound makes the grandest tone, few words form the truest harmony.

Vast and silent, he does not change with life or death, nor worry over the scattered details of the world.

65.

Baopuzi said, when the forest grows thick, the woodcutter enters, when the pearl shines bright, worms bore through it.

Stones that bear gold are melted in fire, herbs that heal are plucked from the ground, blades that cut swiftly chip first, and strings that sing sweetly snap soonest.

To use one's gifts with moderation is the treasure of the sage. To flaunt them for the world is the misfortune of talent.

66.

Baopuzi said, when a mark is fixed, the arrow flies toward it, when a good name rises, slander soon follows.

Those who hoard rare treasures invite resentment though none accuse them, those whose pride fills their hearts summon disaster though none call it.

67.

Baopuzi said, jewels worth a thousand gold cannot be bought by the poor, and talents that surpass the age cannot be recognized by the vulgar.

Yet a treasure of a foot's length does not lose its brilliance because none know it, and the virtuous man does not lessen his spirit because fortune denies him.

To rest in Heaven's will and accept one's lot, what is there to resent or blame?

68.

Baopuzi said, the great roc has no need of dawn to rise, the mighty elephant has no skill in the chase.

Jiang Wan failed in small affairs yet became a pillar of the state, Chen Ping was poor at household matters yet devised six subtle stratagems.

69.

Baopuzi said, brightness and darkness belong to talent, which cannot be feigned; success and failure belong to time, which cannot be forced.

Lü Shang was not slow to awaken, but fortune met him late. Han Xin was not timid at first, but triumph came only after hardship.

70.

Baopuzi said, a galloping steed cannot overtake the word once spoken, and a thousand gold cannot erase a single flaw in speech.

Therefore it is better to guard one's tongue than to multiply one's deeds, better to restrain one's words than to exhaust oneself in pursuit.

71.

Baopuzi said, when a hero loves his country as his home, and serves his ruler as his parent, he will never act in disloyalty or shame.

When the benevolent see others as themselves, and treat the distant as the near, they will never fall into resentment or blame.

72.

Baopuzi said, if ice does not form thickly and snow does not gather deep, the green pine cannot reveal its steadfastness.

When customs are upright and morals untarnished, purity of heart cannot be known.

Thus Zhuang Lai, poor in a troubled state, still upheld the glory of detachment, and Zeng Lie, hungry amid chaos, still showed the greatness of simplicity.

73.

Baopuzi said, Heaven dwells high yet sees the lowly, its net may be wide but it never misses.

The spirits are wise and upright, rewarding what is true and punishing what is false.

When harmony prevails across the nine lands, the seven stars shine with perfect light, when cruelty fills creation, the two breaths of Yin and Yang fall into confusion.

74.

Baopuzi said, Heaven's order knows no limit in dignity, and among men, no rank stands above virtue.

Confucius, though a common man, is worshipped for a hundred generations, while tyrants like Jie and Zhou, though kings, are despised even by their servants.

The more despised their lives, the heavier their crimes.

Thus the tomb of Liu Hui is nobler than the palace of the King of Qi, and the humble gate of Kang Cheng shines brighter than the halls of Qin.

75.

Baopuzi said, form and sound cannot appear without substance, and fortune cannot come without virtue.

Yao ruled over seventy years before the auspicious star appeared, and Lord Yang's steady conduct brought forth golden rain.

The road that is far takes time to reach, and deeds done late bear fruit after delay.

76.

Baopuzi said, what has reached its limit cannot exceed it, and what is perfect cannot be forced to serve all.

The wave at the river's end cannot move the floating weed, the wind that has passed cannot lift the dust, the bow that has spent its strength cannot pierce silk, the setting sun cannot light the eastern hills.

77.

Baopuzi said, though the sun and moon may wane, they cannot be compared to the fleeting flame of a firefly, and though the Yellow River runs turbid, it is still greater than the clearest pool.

The mountain may crumble, but it is still higher than the mound, the tiger may grow thin, but it is still fiercer than the wolf.

78.

Baopuzi said, if Shennong had not suffered illness, the art of medicine would not have been born, if Yu the Great had not labored through floods, the divine jade seal would not have descended.

Deep sorrow becomes the root of lasting joy, and brief toil is the beginning of enduring rest.

79.

Baopuzi said, though golden hooks and cassia bait are precious, they cannot capture the deep fish of the abyss, though rank and riches are high, they cannot move the hermit free of desire.

Thus by the Lüliang River stand men who live like cranes, and by the riverbank dwell those who sing while cutting wood.

Gifts of silk and jade pile at the hermit's door, but his heart remains unmoved.

80.

Baopuzi said, what one sees and hears differs with each, love and hate seldom agree.

Birds flee at the sight of beauty, fish dive at the sound of sacred music.

The brilliance of ornaments cannot please the eyes of the crude, nor the pure sound of strings delight the ear of the servant.

The benevolence of a sage cannot be grasped by those ruled by desire, nor the eloquence of the wise be understood by the dull of heart.

81.

Baopuzi said, the graceful bearing of the noble offends the crude, and the craftsman who uses compass and rule is despised in the shop of crooked wood.

The greedy hate the brightness of pure silk, and the envious resent the solitary virtue of the upright.

So the merchant despises those who share profit, and the ugly woman envies the beauty that surpasses her.

82.

Baopuzi said, when the gentleman rises to honor, he raises the worthy and shares his wealth, but when the common man gains power, he grows proud and neglects the virtuous.

He bestows favor upon flatterers, and uses wealth on petty gifts.

He refuses to share peace with the wise, yet expects their aid in peril, he withholds joy from the noble, yet seeks their pity in grief.

Such is as absurd as praying for rain amid wildfire, or cutting boats for flood while the waters already rise.

83.

Baopuzi said, the cloud that soars does not know the burden of mud, the noble in power rarely feels the toil of the lowly.

Yet when roots decay, no tree can stay green, and when people bear resentment, even sage rulers cannot hold the world long in peace.

Chapter 40 - On Words and Meaning (辭義)

1.

Someone said,

“Heaven and Earth are square and round without the work of compass or rule.

The Three Lights spread their brilliance without the polish of jade.

Spring flowers bloom bright without gradual dye, and orchids give fragrance without borrowing from the air.

To know what is truly real is to value what is natural.

Rarity gives meaning to righteousness, and irregularity gives beauty to words.

Yet when we look through the writers of past and present, few can produce beauty and freedom from their brush, and most measure and borrow from the words before them. Why is this so?”

2.

Baopuzi said,

“Pure tone lies in harmonious rhythm, and good writing is prized when it clarifies the subtle and divides truth from confusion.

The eight tones differ in form yet share one harmony, the five colors vary yet complete each other.

Rough and smooth each have their use, beauty and ugliness each their order.

Thus the great musician has no fixed tune, the master cook no fixed flavor.

Wood piled on Mount Yu cannot form a carriage without a skilled craftsman, and countless books cannot yield essence without a gifted mind.

Why must one search ten thousand miles for timber before building a hall, or record the words of spirits before creating writings?”

3.

Baopuzi said,

“Talent has clarity or dullness, and thought has depth or brevity.

Though both may write, their works differ by ten thousand measures.

Some are vast but lack coherence, some are clever but dull in tone, some diverge from truth though graceful in style.

Each excels in one but not all.

Those blind to their own limits seek to master everything, forcing skill beyond nature, and so earn ridicule.”

4.

Baopuzi said,

“The five flavors differ yet all can be sweet, the many colors clash yet all may be fair.

Common men love what agrees with them and despise what differs, they prize likeness and scorn the strange.

But the style of writing is hardest to judge.

If it pleases the ear, they call it good, if it suits the heart, they find it fine, yet few grasp the charm of transcendent tone or the grace of ancient song.

They test the sourness of salt and plum, but know not the richness of the great broth.

They praise light skill and wit, but ignore the deep and vast.

Those of bright and noble spirit weave meaning beyond colors, those narrow and bound stay trapped within the cage.

As wings differ in strength, flight rises or falls, as feet differ in speed, steps go near or far.

One cannot tune the stiff string to both dull and sharp.

Writing should be abundant and full, why must all be called good in one mouth?

If it cannot uplift the age or rescue the world, or guide the doubtful and relieve the poor, it is like spring flowers that cannot feed hunger or orchids that cannot warm the cold.

Ancient poems exposed faults and thus were valued.

Now poems speak only hollow praise and so are despised."

5.

Baopuzi said,

"Writers each have their faults.

The deep thinker errs by overloading with examples and long speech, wishing to omit but unable to part, till excess arises.

The shallow writer errs by beauty without foundation, lacking proof or substance, bright on the surface but weak within.

When words grow ornate they rival the seven lights in splendor, when meaning grows profound it matches the dark abyss in mystery.

Human affairs are many and subtle, the kingly way has no detail too small.

Thus one may live humbly yet speak nobly, and even after a thousand years his words still shine."

Chapter 41 - Returning to the Root (循本)

1.

Baopuzi said,

Quiet emptiness and tranquil stillness are the roots of divine clarity.

The softness and firmness of yin and yang are the roots of the two principles.

Towering cliffs and lofty peaks are the roots of the mountains.

Virtue and learning are the roots of the noble man.

Nothing can stand without a root.

Therefore, if one would raise something high, one must first strengthen its base.

If one would see the branches flourish, one must first deepen the roots.

When friends in one's own village are not in harmony, yet one labors to seek allies from afar, when one's service in office brings no praise, yet one seeks sudden fame beyond one's station, though one may gain empty praise, it is like blossoms flashing beneath a dry frost, shining for a moment but withering by dawn.

Even one who seizes great treasure by chance and rides upon dust to lofty height is like a fragile shellfish clinging to the waves, seeming to soar yet soon stranded upon barren ground.

Thus the sages and worthies were ever diligent and cautious, while the shallow and pretentious are ever negligent and rash.

Those long steeped in custom forget the stench of the fish market, and those born in the naked village do not sense the shame of their own exposure.

Unless one withdraws from the world without regret and views success and failure as equal, how could one abandon the easy and near to pursue the distant and hard?

To heal this corruption there is but one way, to lift the people from the cliffs and woods, and to appoint the worthy without counting rank or favor.

Chapter 42 - Answering the Mockery (應嘲)

1.

Baopuzi said,

A guest once mocked me, saying,

“Master, you keep your mind wrapped in unity and hide your spirit in the deep.

You turn your back on the world and live apart, distant and quiet.

You seem resolved yet hesitant, not settled upon the arts of the heart.

You seem detached from worldly ties, yet still speak of the duties of ruler and minister.

You refuse public service, yet compose writings on how rulers should act and ministers should serve.

You avoid society, yet write essays that criticize vulgar customs and rescue human life.

You love stillness and clarity, yet include in your works the methods of war and defense.

You shun advancement, yet discuss how to discern the worthy and the unworthy.

I am confused by this.”

2.

Baopuzi said,

“The bond between ruler and minister stands next only to Heaven and Earth.

Those who find joy in the Way keep the same mind whether they rise or retire.

Whether hidden or revealed, they act according to the times.

Why should words be bound to circumstance?

A great man adapts to the changes of the world.

Laozi practiced non-action, Guiguzi remained hidden, yet both wrote books that discussed worldly affairs.

Must one first hold office before one may speak of government?

If a vessel is not of jade, it will not attract the tears of the land of Chu.

If a man has no inner substance of a hidden dragon, wind and cloud will not gather around him.

My talent is slight, my virtue thin, unfit to govern, yet my withdrawal and engagement come from the same root.

My action and stillness follow one principle.

Must one be an official before one can discuss the affairs of rulers and ministers?

If not, then one may not speak of order and chaos?

I have long regretted that Zhuangzi's words and deeds sometimes cut at one another.

He chained himself within eccentric talk, living in the lacquer garden yet speaking wildly, loving to draw ghosts and spirits while scorning pictures of dogs and horses.

He belittled loyalty and righteousness and mocked sincerity and faith.

This is like carving tigers and painting dragons yet failing to summon the wind and cloud, or counting riches on a board yet having no coin to spend.

A child's bamboo horse may amuse him, but it still scrapes his feet; a scholar's piled scrolls fill his desk, yet do not fill his belly."

3.

Someone else said,

“But your writings strike against the customs of the world.

Your words are severe and direct.

I fear they will only bring resentment from those in power, rejection from your own age.

Surely this is not the way to gain fame or honor.”

4.

Baopuzi said,

“The maker of tools is valued for skill in meeting urgent need, not for decorating the surface.

The writer is prized for aiding moral teaching, not for pleasing the crowd.

If one merely flatters and bends, praising what is false and hiding what is wrong, how could one correct error or awaken the deluded?

To abandon fine music because few understand it, or to despise the price of jade because it sells slowly, I have no wish for that.

It is not that I cannot write with flowery brilliance to please others, nor that I do not know that plain truth often brings dislike.

But I cannot twist my words against my heart or mingle truth and falsehood.

I wish only that my speech and mind agree, that I feel no shame before the clear light, and that perhaps a kindred spirit will appear in a later age.

Fortune and failure have their fate.

Success and obstruction rest with Heaven.

Why must one’s writings be accepted and praised in one’s own lifetime?

When the noble man opens his mouth or sets his pen, it is to awaken what is obscured, to straighten what has become crooked, to polish away what is dark and confused.

But writers today only embellish their words and toy with ornament, spreading tangled and useless speech.

They value ornate beauty and empty sound, like the books on white and hard, or the disputations on names and punishments.

Their words roam beyond Heaven and Earth, sink into what cannot be entered, unbinding rings, splitting sameness and difference, speaking of birds that cast no shadows and eggs that walk on feet, of dogs that can become sheep, of serpents and tortoises of impossible size.

They only display skill and strangeness to dazzle the vulgar.

This is like painting granaries to relieve hunger, or gazing at the Milky Way to quench thirst.

To speak of Mount Kunlun's store of jade does not feed the poverty of Yuan Xian.

To read the register of medicines does not heal the dying.

When Mozi carved a wooden cock to oppose Heaven, it was not as useful as a three-inch bronze blade to block harm.

When Guan Qing cast golden images of fine horses, they were not as useful as a dull mule that could carry loads.

Words lofty as autumn sky yet of no practical use are not the Way I follow."

Chapter 43 - On Misguided Criticism (喻蔽)

1.

Baopuzi said,

I have long admired Wang Chong, whose Disquisitions on Balance (Lunheng) spans over eighty chapters.

He stands as a master of thought among the worthies of the world.

But one of my fellow students, a man from Lu, once argued with me, saying,

“Fine jade is precious because it is rare, and gravel is cheap because it is common.

Thus Fuxi’s trigrams are fewer than ten, yet they encompass the workings of Heaven and Earth.

Laozi’s words are less than ten thousand, yet the Way and Virtue are fully expressed.

But Wang Chong’s writings fill boxes and volumes.

He wanders in and out between schools, sometimes Confucian, sometimes Mohist.

His phrases and arguments are uneven and not all fine.

It is like weeds growing across the fields, not like good grain growing in ordered rows.”

2.

Baopuzi replied,

“The one who creates is called a sage, the one who transmits is called a worthy.

We know their ranks, but who has ever set a measure for the length of their works?

You, my friend, hide in narrow shade and cannot see the boundless sky.

You cling to the glow of a small lamp and do not know the brilliance of sun and moon.

You play in shallow pools and think the great ocean the same.

You stand upon a low mound and do not perceive the height of Mount Tai.

The Two Principles are called great because they embrace the eight directions and have no limits.

The mountains and seas are rich because they gather all things and hold them without end.

If, as you say, we honor the few and despise the many, then Heaven's vastness would not be praised for its greatness, and the Earth's depth would not be honored for its strength.

In puddles there are no fish that can swallow ships.

On short branches there are no wings that can shade the sky.

On ant-hills there are no forests of Fusang.

In a ditch there are no rivers that can flood the plains.

The great turtle raises its head above the Isles of the Immortals, the vast fish stirs the waves of the celestial sea.

The thunder's roar cannot be made small.

The Yellow River's current cannot be confined.

A galloping steed cannot shorten its stride, and a soaring swan cannot lower its flight.

When clouds grow thick, rain falls hard.

When the bow is strong, the arrow flies far.

So too Wang Chong's learning is broad and his talent great — why belittle it?"

3.

"You say that jade is rare and so is precious, and that stone is common and so is cheap.

But under the Garden of Heaven and upon the Peak of Jinghua there are lakes and caves filled with gems.

Their radiance fills the night sky, are they not beautiful still?

You mention that Fuxi wrote little, yet Zhou Gong expanded upon the Changes with ritual and music, and Confucius composed the Spring and Autumn Annals and added ten commentaries.

All wrote more than Fuxi or Laozi.

Should they too be condemned?

When words are few, the principle is incomplete.

When speech is short, affairs are not expressed in full.

Thus a writer must gather many scrolls before the great thread is revealed.

The Sun rises to open the dawn, the Moon shines to light the night.

The five elements coexist with different uses, the hundred medicines grow together and cure different ills.

The four seasons alternate and bring the year to order.

The five colors blend and form the beauty of brocade.

The eight tones join and make harmonious music.

So too all words combine and give distinction to the arts of the Way.

To hold the riches of Yi Dun yet make little use of them is like Yuan Xian's poverty.

To have great thought but meager writings is hardly better than the petty.

Music is valued by those who understand sound, books are passed on by those who know meaning.

The tune of Kuang was not written for his own age, and words of wisdom need no praise to endure.

The rivers and seas contain filth beyond count, yet do not lose their depth.

The Five Peaks have crooked trees without lessening their height.

The jade of the Xia may have a flaw, yet its brilliance still shines.

So too in ten thousand lines of text, if a few words lack polish, the greatness of meaning covers them.

The turbid four rivers are not to be compared with a pot of clear water, and the thin elephant is not equal to a fat lamb."

4.

"You also mock him, saying, 'He drifts between schools, now Confucian, now Mohist.'

But to speak is to use the mouth, and to write is to fix speech on paper.

Writing records speech, and speech records truth.

If a writer may not mix subjects, then a speaker must never vary his words.

When lords asked about government and disciples asked about virtue, Confucius answered each in a different way.

He adapted his counsel to the case and spoke to meet the time, just as a doctor uses a thousand medicines but no fixed cure.

He warms the cold and cools the hot, seeking only to save life.

Shall the wise insist on one path like Qi and Chu and never change their road?

The wealth of Tao Zhu and Bai Gui came from using many trades.

The vast lands of Yunmeng and Mengzhu grew countless living things.

The Huainanzi begins with the chapters Origin of the Way and True Beginning, yet it also contains Military Strategy and Rulership.

Zhuangzi spoke of life and death as one, yet also wrote of fearing sacrifice, honoring the tortoise, and begging grain to feed the hungry.

If we discard writings because their words are not pure, it is like cutting out one's eyes to cure blindness, chopping off one's foot to heal a sore, or cutting down the whole tree to remove dead branches."

Chapter 44 - The Hundred Schools (百家)

11.

Baopuzi said,

The writings of the Hundred Schools, though not all adorned with clear phrasing or sharp brilliance, are nevertheless the vessels of talent and thought, the distilled reflections of men of insight.

The orthodox classics are the vast sea of moral principle.

The philosophical writings of the Masters are the rivers that deepen and extend that sea.

Looking upward, they are like the attendant stars that aid the three great luminaries.

Looking downward, they are like the forests and valleys that support the lofty mountains.

Yet students often cling to one craft alone, dwelling at the bottom of a well and forgetting the ocean.

They stumble and fall in the mud of narrowness and become trapped in the stillness of their own limits.

The writings of the Masters open wide to the profound and far-reaching, vast and deep as a hidden pool.

They draw from unfathomable sources and spread without end.

They change and transform without being bound by fixed rules, and they connect all things without straying into heresy.

Their tone is lofty and dignified, their depth immeasurable.

Those who taste only the sour and sweet cannot appreciate their flavor.

Those whose thought is narrow cannot discern their spirit.

The ancients sighed that true talent is rare.

Thus, through a hundred generations, men have followed in the steps of the wise.

They did not discard a hidden gem because it was not from the hills of jade, nor did they throw away the treasures that shine through night because they were not from the schools of Zhou or Confucius.

It is like those who draw water: though their vessels differ, their purpose is the same, to quench fire.

It is like the healers of needle and moxa: their methods may vary, yet their aim(to cure disease) is one.

But the narrow-minded, bound to a single view, cling obstinately to one corner and forsake the vast and subtle.

Their thought is shallow though they ponder deeply.

They weigh grains of dust as though equal to mountains.

They hoard hundreds and thousands, yet fail to reach the measure of ten thousand.

They are enchanted by the trivial glitter of poems and rhapsodies, while neglecting the profound beauty of the Masters' discussions.

They confuse truth and falsehood, mix jade with stone, equate courtly music with vulgar song, and judge the dragon's design equal to plain silk.

How sad and lamentable!

Is this not the deepest of errors?

Chapter 45 - On Writing and Conduct (文行)

1.

Someone said,

“Virtue and conduct are the root, and writing and literature are the branches.

Thus, in the four divisions of learning, writing is not placed first. If so, then to put words upon paper is but a dreg among affairs, and what is transmitted to later ages is no more than a straw-dog cast aside after sacrifice.

Between the noble and the base, this distinction seems worthy of reproach.”

2.

Baopuzi replied,

“The fish may live without the net, but before it is caught, the net cannot be discarded. The Way may stand without writing, but before it spreads, writing cannot be ignored.

As for the reach of the brush and the rhythm of tone, the grace or awkwardness of style, the depth or shallowness of thought, their difference is as vast as Heaven and as fine as a hair.

Even the light of the Three Luminaries cannot compare to such subtlety, even the sharpness of the sword or the weight of gold cannot serve as its likeness.

Yet the common scholar, seeing only a man who stains the brush and draws upon paper, judges him by the same rule.

Thus Bo Yi longed for Zhong Zi, and the craftsman of Ying could not move his chisel, each knowing there is something beyond reach.

Many swing the axe, yet only Ban Gu and Di Renjie are famed as masters of the stroke, many strike the lute, yet only Kui and Xiang are praised for the purity of sound.

Though stables hold a thousand horses, only the qilin stands far above the herd, though beauties are countless, only Xi Shi shines with a grace that surpasses all.

The reason is simply that their excellence transcends the multitude.

Writing and virtue are like ten feet and one fathom, distinct yet continuous.

To call writing a mere remainder is something I have never heard.

From the flight of hawks came the trigrams of the Yi, from the marks on the turtle's shell came the cycle of the calendar.

Where writing is found, the root is still honored, yet the branch need not be despised.

Silk brocade depends upon its woven ground, and pearls are carried in rough stone, clouds and rain are born from a hand's breadth of vapor, and rivers begin from a single spring.

If this is truly the pattern of the world, then the critics of writing are mistaken."

3.

He also said, "The divine dragon rises slowly yet with one glance soars among the clouds, the sweating-blood horse moves gently yet with one breath covers a thousand miles.

Thus ants wonder how it climbs without steps, and dull beasts marvel that it passes beyond them without effort.

So too, those who race within the fields of poetry or wander through one scripture alone, who judge vast excellence by common sense and measure the boundless with narrow sight, can never comprehend.

From youth to white hair they strive, yet never arrive.

Moreover, people tend to exalt the ancient and belittle the present, to revere what they have heard and slight what they see.

Even when a horse that runs faster than the wind stands before them, they claim it cannot equal the steeds that Bole once drove. Even when a flawless gem is unearthed, they insist it is not the one that made the craftsmen of Chu weep.

Even when a sword splits stone at a touch, they say it falls short of Ouye's forging. Even when a medicine revives the dead, they say it cannot match the elixir of He and Que. Even when a man of virtue stands solitary and radiant, they still claim he is not equal to the ancients."

Chapter 46 - On Setting Right the Judgment of Guo Linzong (正郭)

1.

Baopuzi said,

“Ji Sheng once praised Guo Linzong of Taiyuan, who refused the summons of the Three Dukes.

His learning was vast, his reputation weighed heavily upon his age, and he was known for his ability to discern men(to know men is to be wise), thus he was called a vessel second only to the sage.

Yet in a declining age he lived restlessly, never finding peace of mind, his mat scarcely warmed before he moved again.

His heart was set on rectifying the world and carrying out the Way, in this resembling Confucius.”

2.

I replied,

“Wisdom and folly lie within a single word. A flaw in the hinge disturbs the whole mechanism. To call him ‘second to the sage’ is not a light matter.

The so-called ‘next to the sage’ must embody the Way in fullness, standing beyond the limits of men, leaving no space between himself and Zhou or Confucius.

Could such a man truly reach that height?

Linzong was indeed outstanding, keen of judgment and clear of sight. Compared with ordinary men, he stands higher, yet still falls short.

He possessed quick wit and fine presence, skill in response and self-presentation, and was aided by men who loved to praise and spread his name across the land. Thus he gained fame in a time of disorder, exalted by those who admired appearance without testing truth.

A few of his words were valued like a thousand gold pieces, and wherever he traveled, he was met with admiration, as though a dragon or phoenix had descended.

When he spoke, echoes were taken for law; when he walked, his steps became a model. He struck the great drum of fashion, raising it to the sun and moon, but he was no true recluse.

He wished to serve in court, but the world was already in chaos. He wished to withdraw, but could not bear solitude.

If he leapt forward, he feared misfortune; if he stayed still, he found no peace.

He wandered between gain and loss, restless and uncertain, and the world pursued his fame without grasping his substance, admired his form without knowing his spirit.

Even when his hat was ruined by rain, people still took it as a sign of virtue. They did not see his flaws, such is the way of the crowd.

Though he studied widely and could judge men, he could not escape the charge of vanity, nor see himself clearly.

When urged to take office, Linzong replied, ‘By day I observe the affairs of men, and by night I watch the patterns of Heaven.

What Heaven has abandoned cannot be supported. The time now lies in the hexagram of Obscured Light, in the position of Inaction. This is the season for concealment and quietude, not the hour for rising to glory.’”

3.

“Even if the land were broad and the way open, I fear the vast sea would still overflow. I am but a fish within it, how could I risk the wind and waves? Better to rest in the mountains, nourish my spirit, and find joy like the immortals of Peng and Lao, living out my years in ease.”

From these words it is clear that Linzong knew the Han could not be saved, yet this judgment was far from perfect.

He ought to have withdrawn into the mountains and lakes, sought the way of the hermits, followed Chao Fu to the high ridges and the fisherman to the clear waters.

If he could not live apart from men, then he should have hidden his brilliance and folded his talents, keeping silence in the deep pools.

But instead he wandered from west to east, never resting, seeking to imitate Confucius and Mozi in their roaming labors. Yet even the sage, when he traveled the states, was blamed for his wandering, though his wisdom far surpassed all.

Linzong’s talent did not match the age, nor his capacity exceed the common measure.

When he acted, he could not bring order or transform the people. When he wrote, he could not continue the Six Classics.

His conduct was self-display, excessive and proud; his name resounded widely, yet his merit was small.

He advanced without aiding governance, retired without leaving record.

Watching his rise and fall, one sees melting ice and withering grass, nothing more than an ordinary man.

He floated aimlessly amid the waves, walking backwards into the dust, roaming the capital, befriending nobles, wearing out his carriage wheels and his traveling chest.

His fame shone brightly, attracting barbarians and lords alike; red-wheeled chariots filled his street, and ministers with crimson cords crowded his hall.

Carriages lined the lanes, yet no true work was done.

He was of the wandering sort, not of the reclusive line. In an age of order he would still not be counted among the truly pure, and that he did this amid chaos is hardly admirable.

Who could say he was not blind to the will of Heaven and the flow of fortune, or clouded in self-knowledge? He turned from the way of stillness, gained nothing in return, and only by luck escaped disaster.

To call this concern for the world, or to liken him to a sage-king, is as if a lame man sought to chase a dragon steed, or a sparrow to follow the swan, or a firefly to rival the roc, or a weasel to match the elephant."

4.

"Thus Linzong may be said to have brilliance that dazzled the world, but lacked firmness to guard his virtue.

His insight was sharp but his spirit hollow, restless and uneasy. His words and deeds were at odds: his mouth spoke of stillness and withdrawal, but his heart longed for fame and gain.

He was no bird resting in the divine grove, no dragon dwelling in the deep abyss.

To boast and to advertise oneself is the shame of both scholar and lady alike. To imitate what one knows is impossible is folly itself, how then could he be called a vessel second to the sage?

Though men say he 'knew others,' to know men truly was the hardest task even for Yao and Shun, and a sorrow for Confucius himself. Even they, though shining as the sun and moon, sometimes erred and could not always judge rightly.

How much less, then, Guo Linzong, whose light was but a flickering lamp, half right and half wrong.

Yet because his fame was heavy in his time and his reputation bright after death, his virtues were remembered but his faults forgotten.

He did at times recognize worthies among the obscure and saw jade within uncut stones, but he never raised loyal men to the court, nor drove away the powers that oppressed the land.

He did not restore order or defeat rebellion.

Baozi once recommended Guan Zhong and achieved merit.

Pingzhong once raised Sun Pin and brought victory. Linzong, though honored by nobles and esteemed by ministers, though his words could stir men and his strength could raise the worthy, lived idly in the capital, gathering guests and friends, doing nothing to aid the realm.

To know men but not recommend them is like knowing fertile soil yet never plowing, or knowing strong beams yet never building.

What good is such knowledge if the people starve and dwell unroofed? To refuse office was indeed lofty, yet his restless wandering was also a sickness."

5.

Ji Sheng said again, "Linzong, while alive, was revered by all; after death, his fragrance endures. Great scholars and noble men never spoke ill of him. And now you alone have found fault, will you not be mocked by later ages?"

Baopuzi replied, "Why should that be? If my words are true, let them be left to posterity. Those of discernment in future times will understand, and I need not fear the scorn of the many.

Indeed, many of the ancients also reproached him, only Huangsheng praised him excessively.

The Grand Tutor Zhuge Wuxun said, ‘Linzong’s reclusion was not true withdrawal, nor was his emergence of benefit to the time.

He sought only fame and praise. He debated in the streets, mocked the rulers, and thus was celebrated by fashion. He was like Guo Jie or Yuan She, following the style of the day.

Later men admired his name without testing his conduct, and so delusion spread.

The governor Yin Bofu of Lingling, a man of high talent and deep judgment, also said, “Linzong mingled with the powerful, traveled through the states, stirred public opinion to move the crowd, and let fame and slander revolve around the court.

Whom he praised soared like the wind and rain; whom he disliked sank like mud and ashes. Though he hid his light in troubled times, this was not true distance.

A gentleman acts to aid his ruler and correct the age. When the ruler cannot be corrected and the age cannot be righted, to speak idly in the lanes and alleys is no cure for decline or relief for the people’s suffering.”

And Zhou Gongyuan, once a court scholar and eminent thinker, said, “To meet order and assist it is to rejoice in the Way, to meet chaos and save it is to grieve for the Way. When chaos cannot be saved and one hides from it, that is to preserve the Way.

Yu Shun rejoiced in the Way, Confucius grieved for the Way, and Wei Zi preserved the Way.

When the Han was collapsing, and the world fell to disorder, Linzong should have opened his heart, sought unity with other gentlemen, and worked to restore rightness. Instead he busied himself as a lord among the idle, not a savior of the age.

Even the eunuchs and attendants found place in those days, and though Chen Fan and Dou Wu held high office, they revered Linzong's words and took his judgments as final.

If he had truly known the worthy, he might have raised men of action and brought change. But he raised none, offered no counsel, and only entertained guests.

The recluses he compared to Chao and Xu. Those who withdrew from duty he likened to the Duke of Zhou. Those who taught students but avoided service he compared to Confucius; those who abandoned kin and followed nobles he likened to You and Xia.

Thus the age was blinded by name and form, and disorder deepened. If Linzong did not know, how can he be called wise? If he knew but did not change, how can he be called one who cares for the Way?

Once, four men seemed like the Duke of Zhou, yet could not be him; and now Linzong seems like Confucius, yet cannot be Confucius."

Hearing this, the questioner sighed and said, "Then truly this man was but one who fled chaos, not one of pure withdrawal."

Chapter 47 - Censure of Mi Heng (彈禰)

1.

Baopuzi said,

“At the end of the Han there was a man named Mi Heng (禰衡), who at twenty-three already surpassed the usual measure of maturity, famed for learning and ranked among the ninth class.

His learning outshone his peers and men praised him both when young and grown, his name and rank were exceptional.

A friend recommended Heng, then a commoner, to the Han court as fit to begin service as a palace attendant (臺郎).”

2.

It is said:

“When a mountain spirit descends, extraordinary men appear together. What the eye takes in one glance he will immediately recite, what the ear catches he will not forget.

His nature harmonized with the Way, his thought seemed inspired.” Thus they praised him.

Heng frequented Xu (許下), regarding all from ministers and nobles downward.

At first he would not address officials by their office, but called them by familiar tags, sometimes by surname plus ‘child’, calling Kong Rong (孔融) ‘Big Boy’, calling Yang Xiu (楊修) ‘Little Boy’.

Xun Yu (荀彧) could barely converse with him, and beyond that everyone seemed like wooden idols or clay figures, human in shape but without human spirit. merely wine jars and drink pouches.

Once, at a great assembly of officials, Heng sat among them but suddenly knit his brow and fell into sorrowful lamentation.

Some mocked, saying, “This is a gathering of heroes and nobles, why weep?”.

Heng glanced through the crowded hall and replied, “Here among these piled corpses and rows of coffins, how can a benevolent man not grieve?”.

3.

Cao Cao once ground his teeth and wanted to put him to death, but there was no lawful charge to fit him, and Cao Cao also hesitated to take on the reputation of killing a scholar, so instead he banished him to be a drum-beater.

Heng showed no shame or repentance. Tied by the corner to a post, he put his mouth to the drum and blew, producing strange sounds, then shook and beat the drum in patterns that made listeners unsure if it was the work of a single man.

But his criticisms only grew sharper and he feared nothing.

Soon he fled and took refuge with Liu Biao, governor of Jingzhou. Liu Biao wished to send a letter to Sun Quan, to rally against the rebels when Sun had already secured Jiangdong and held a hundred thousand armored men, seeking allied aid to stand against central China.

The scholars were set to draft letters and could not find the right expression. They showed them to Heng. Heng glanced them over and said, “If you merely want Sun’s men to hold their knives and stare at this, it will do, but if Zhang Zibu (張子布) were to read it, it would be a great disgrace”.

He then tore the drafts to pieces and flung them down. Biao was astonished and said, “Is this not too blunt? A pity”.

4.

Heng demanded paper and brush and rewrote the text. The many drafts the others had composed numbered more than ten.

Heng merely looked them through once, memorized them in secret, and when done he returned the originals to Biao.

Some compared Heng's returned draft against the originals and found not a single character wrong, each was astonished.

Biao then asked Heng to compose another; Heng did so without pause, his hand never still, and Biao greatly praised it and employed it.

5.

Heng's arrogance then grew excessive. The people of the province came to hate him, and Biao could no longer tolerate him and sought to kill him.

Some advised leniency on the grounds that Cao Cao, though harsh, could be patient.

Heng's fame was but a slender renown, and if he were killed then wandering scholars everywhere would no longer seek refuge in Jing and Chu. So Biao sent him away instead. Heng fled to Xiakou and attached himself to the general Huang Zu, who treated him as an honored guest.

Huang Zu's eldest son, Huang She (黃射), traveled with Heng. Passing by a tomb, they read the inscription in passing and moved on.

6.

After a while, She said, "The epitaph we just read was excellent. I wish I had written it down".

Heng replied, "You keep the names and headings in mind. I only need one glance.".

He then secretly wrote it down, but the last character was missing on the stone and therefore unclear.

Heng and She disputed the missing character.

Heng offered half a character, saying, "Perhaps this should be such-and-such; I am uncertain.".

She examined it and accepted Heng's reading (text here is missing in the source).

Although his conduct was light and he preferred fame, he nevertheless desired honor.

He was a high-roaming spirit like a phoenix in the woods, unable to hide in the reeds and brambles. Though he sought cultivation, his words were biting and he did not perceive it, so he opened his mouth and made himself hated, took a step and courted disaster.

Bearing such talents, what right had he to expect to live untroubled in the world until his death? Like an owl's cry or a fox's yelp, people do not enjoy them, the sound remains unchanged, and changing residence brings no benefit.

Xu was a sea of men and letters; the examiners set the tests and bore the burden to the limit. Heng, uneasy in such a place, was already known to be ill-fated. Yet he would not correct himself, he instead attached to the Yue peoples and met an untimely end.

A rotten log and a dull ingot are not the work of Banxu or Ouye; though he fled among Jing and Chu, he finally fell into grave harm, this is the effect of Heng's blind folly.

He desired what he could not obtain, not that he could obtain but refused to use. Let loose-tongued scholars be warned.

7.

Ji Sheng said, "What puzzles me is Heng's empty fame. What you have described is Heng's real disease.

How can one not wake at night and grasp the compass, cast the staff into the broken center?" (i.e., be roused to correct oneself).

Chapter 48 - Refuting Bao Sheng (詰鮑)

1.

Student Bao, courteous in speech, admired the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and excelled in clever debate. He said that “the ancients without rulers were superior to the people of today.”

Thus he wrote in his treatise:

“The Confucians say: ‘Heaven gives birth to the people and sets up rulers for them.’

Would Heaven truly speak with such purpose, as though it wished this to be so?

When the strong dominate the weak, the weak submit. When the wise deceive the foolish, the foolish serve them.

From such submission came the ways of ruler and subject; from such service came the power of the few over the many.

Thus bondage and command arise from contests of strength and cunning.

Heaven itself is blameless, the vast void values namelessness, and living beings delight in freedom.

To strip cinnamon bark or carve lacquer is not the wish of trees.

To pluck the feathers of kingfishers and pheasants is not the joy of birds.

To bit the mouth and harness the neck is not the nature of horses.

To load carts and drag weight is not the pleasure of oxen.

From the sprouting of trickery and force, truth was lost.

The root of life was cut, to polish things of no use.

Flying creatures were hunted for ornament, natural creatures were pierced through the nose and bound by the feet.

Such was not the intent of creation that all things should live together.

When the many are driven to serve the few, and officials are fattened on the people's labor, the noble grow rich and the people become poor.

If death could bring back life, joy would be boundless, yet better still was the time before death was known."

2.

"To decline office and refuse rank to fish for an empty name, is that better than never having declined at all?

When the world turns chaotic, then loyalty and righteousness appear. When kin quarrel, then filial piety and kindness are praised.

In the ancient days, there were no rulers and no ministers. They drew water from wells to drink, tilled the soil to eat, rose with the sun and rested with the dusk, unbound and content.

They did not strive or scheme, knew neither honor nor disgrace.

The mountains had no paths, the marshes no boats or bridges.

Because valleys were not crossed, there was no rivalry.

Because men did not gather, there were no wars.

High nests were unsearched, deep pools unnetted.

Phoenixes rested in courtyards, dragons swam in garden ponds.

Hungry tigers could be trodden upon, venomous snakes grasped by hand.

Crossing marshes, gulls did not rise. Entering woods, foxes were unafraid.

Where no pursuit of gain arose, disorder had no cause.

Weapons were not used, walls were not built.

All beings shared the same mystery and forgot themselves in the Way.

Plagues did not spread, the people lived out their years.

Their hearts were pure and free of calculation.

They ate with delight, drummed their bellies and wandered.

Their words were plain, their actions simple.

Who then could have gathered wealth to rob the people?

Who could have forged harsh laws to trap them?”

3.

“In later ages, cleverness was born and deceit arose.

When the Way and Virtue declined, ranks and titles appeared, and the ceremonies of rise and fall, gain and loss, multiplied.

They embroidered robes of black and yellow, built towers touching the clouds, painted halls in red and green, dredged mountains for treasure, and dived the deeps for pearls.

They gathered jade like forests, yet could not satisfy change.

They piled gold into hills, yet could not meet their spending.

They sank into luxury and forgot the true beginning, moving farther from simplicity and adding layer upon layer of artifice.

When worth was prized, men fought for fame.

When wealth was honored, thieves arose.

When desirable things were seen, the mind of integrity was disturbed.

When profit was displayed, the path of robbery was opened.

They made sharp weapons and thus bred deeper harm.

Bows feared to lack strength, armor feared to lack hardness, spears feared to lack sharpness, shields feared to lack thickness.

If there were no oppression or violence, all these could be discarded.

Therefore it is said if white jade were never broken, who would make ceremonial tablets?

If the Way and Virtue were never lost, whence would come talk of benevolence and righteousness?

Because tyrants like Jie and Zhou became kings, they could burn alive those who remonstrated, salt the flesh of nobles, slice the bones of ministers, tear out hearts, break legs, and invent tortures of fire and iron.

If such men had been mere commoners, though cruel and extravagant, how could they have done this?

Because they were kings, they could indulge their will.

Once ruler and subject were established, evils multiplied daily.

Then men struggled in fetters and burned in their own suffering."

4.

"The rulers trembled in their palaces, the people groaned in distress.

Rites and laws were set to restrain them, punishments and rules to control them,

yet this was like trying to dam a boundless flood with a handful of earth, or block the tide with one's palms."

5.

Baopuzi said,

"When the dim chaos first opened, the turbid sank and the pure rose.

Heaven arched above and earth spread below, the dome lifted high and the plains lay firm. Heaven and earth took their stations, the upper and lower assumed form.

Looking far to the pattern of things, Heaven is high and Earth is low, thus is shown the order of human relations. Looking near to one's own body, the head and limbs mark the order of ruler and minister.

The paths of rising and descending, of command and response, have been so since the beginning.

When the Great Ultimate was still undivided and the Two Forces without form, it was not as good as when black and yellow were separated, the seven lights appeared, yin and yang began to refine and shape, and the ten-thousand beings were born in their kinds.

From this we know that birds gather and beasts scatter, some nest in trees and some burrow in earth, some feed on flesh and some clothe themselves with grass.

In those earliest days there was no bond of ruler and subject, no ranking of high and low. They wore grass as clothing and ate raw flesh, without moral tie or guidance.

How could that compare with the age of grand palaces and broad roofs, with sweet grains and fine wine, with silks and patterned brocades, where warm robes guard against winter and thin ones against summer, where enlightened rulers govern the realm and able ministers manage affairs, each office in order and the world harmonious?

When honor and rank are made clear, men learn to value reward and fear punishment. If power were equal and strength balanced, men would seize and rob without restraint. Therefore sages arose, receiving the Mandate of Heaven.

They wove nets for hunting and fishing, looked up to the stars to drill fire, tasted herbs to find what nourished, built houses to shelter from wind and rain.

They made tools for use, removed harm and brought benefit. The people rejoiced and exalted them, and thus the way of ruler and subject was born. How then can you say it came from deceit of the wise and oppression of the weak?

As the Three August Ones and Five Emperors succeeded one another, the Way grew and teaching flourished, persuasion and admonition balanced each other, virtue was full and punishment mild.

When the wise ruler and good minister sang together, the transforming power of virtue spread through the world.

Heaven’s steps were leveled, the seven stars followed their course, the phoenix called at dawn, the unicorn appeared, the turtle and dragon rose from rivers bearing jade, and radiance filled the skies.

The imperial wind reached the nine regions, the weapons rested in the armory, rites were established so that rulers were at peace, music was played so that punishments ceased.

If later ages brought luxury and violence, that was born of men's own hearts, not of the existence of rulers.

Yet Master Bao blames only the kings of decay and never speaks of the meaning of perfect order, why is that?"

6.

"Moreover, in the distant past the people were simple only because they had not yet changed.

Their minds were like those of infants, pure and unawakened. It was not that they knew and chose not to act, but that they lacked the wisdom to do so.

If men and families began to fight over grasslands and caves, with no authority above to judge them, each would rely on his kin, and private battles would exceed public wars.

Clubs and stones would take the place of spears and shields, corpses would fill the wilds and blood would stain the paths, and with no ruler to restrain them, all life would perish.

When dragons were tamed and phoenixes came forth, when the River Chart and Luo Writing appeared, when unicorns bore armor and red birds brought messages, these were all in the ages of kings, not in times without rulers.

Auspicious signs arise from the deepest mystery. Some mark the renewal of a mandate, some reveal the height of virtue.

If rulers were against Heaven's will, who would send these blessings?

If you think chaos and formlessness are the highest state, then Heaven and Earth should never have been divided.

If you think namelessness is supreme, then the Eight Trigrams should never have been drawn. Would you claim that Creation itself was mistaken, and that the great ancestors were blind?

You prize the natural and unmade, yet consider this: to know one's mother but forget one's father is the nature of beasts.

To bow and kneel is the refinement of humankind.

If we cast away nature, we lose respect; if we cast away refinement, we lose civility.

Can both be discarded and still be called right?"

7.

"In the remote past, the living had no houses and the dead no burials.

Rivers had no boats, and the land no wagons.

They ate raw meat and poisonous herbs and died in great number; there were no physicians, and unjust deaths were countless.

Later sages changed this and handed down their ways, and even now the people enjoy their mercy. The benefits of skill and craft cannot be undone.

Now suppose you lived as they did, dwelling in caves, dying unburied in open fields, swimming across rivers, climbing mountains on foot, throwing away cauldrons and eating raw flesh, abandoning needles and letting illness take its course, going naked and calling it beauty, taking women without ceremony.

Would you, Master Bao, truly say this is right?

If ancient men were as wood and stone, not chilled by ice nor starved by hunger, perhaps they could live so.

But once hunger and warmth arise in the heart, men will fight for acorns and wild herbs as fiercely as others for gold and rank.

Desire is born with the breath, self-interest grows with the flesh, violence and greed arise from nature, and without order there is no peace.

When an enlightened king sits above, his ministers take him as model.

He rises early and sleeps late, welcomes criticism to correct himself, listens even to the songs of the people, and each night examines his conduct.

He clears corruption with pure wind, brings awe with autumn rigor, and weaves strict yet just law. For small wrongs he uses punishment, for great crimes he raises armies.

Even so there are wolves on the road and traitors in the court. If he slackens, the wicked thrive.

Therefore hawk-like officers must strike rebellion, tiger-like generals must guard the provinces. Yet even then, villains never cease. How could letting all restraint go possibly succeed?

If all fear were gone and men did as they pleased, then bandits like Zhi would roam freely, killing and plundering at will, while the good would sit helpless awaiting disaster.

With no ruler to appeal to and no strong to defend them, could everyone be as pure as Yi Yin or as kind as Liu Hui?

That would be like wishing a pig had no stench, or crossing a river without getting wet, or riding a horse with no reins, or sailing a boat with no oar. It cannot be done.”

8.

Bao said,

“Heaven and Earth each have their position, the two breaths shape all things.

Those who love the sun rise with the clouds, those who delight in the moon rest by the rivers.

Soft and hard follow their natures, the four seasons move and transform, each creature clings to what it finds fitting. There was never high or low.

Once rulers and ministers were established, confusion multiplied.

When otters abound, the fish are troubled. When hawks are many, the birds are disturbed. When officials are set up, the people suffer.

When those above are rich, those below grow poor. Treasure and wealth are hoarded, palaces and terraces adorned, the ruler eats from plates the size of rooms, and wears robes embroidered with dragons.

Inside, the harems are filled with idle women. Outside, there are many unmarried men.

Rare jewels and strange curios are gathered, useless things are made, desires have no end and this is not the work of gods or ghosts.

From where comes the wealth to sustain it?”

9.

“When grain and silk are stored in the palaces, the people fall to hunger and cold.

When all offices are filled, the state is wasted by the cost of supplying them.

The guards and attendants feed without labor, and the people must nourish idle men.

When the poor can barely clothe and feed themselves, yet are burdened with taxes and forced labor, how can they endure?

Thus the ruler frets in his palace while the people suffer below.

He fears the strong may revolt, so he offers heavy salaries and high rank to lure them.

He fears secret treachery, so he builds high walls and deep moats to defend himself.

But he does not see that lavish pay exhausts the people, and strong walls burden their labor.

When the gold of the Deer Terrace and the grain of the Great Granary were scattered to the people, all rejoiced.

How much better would it have been never to hoard them at all, and never to tax the people for them?

When King Cheng of Zhou rested the oxen of Taolin and released the horses of Huashan, when bows and armor were stored away, peace was praised. How much better still if there had never been war to begin with!

In old times, kings lived in thatched halls with earthen steps, queens wove cloth and picked greens, curtains were made from hemp, robes from plain cloth.

Concubines did not wear silk, horses ate no grain. They ruled by frugality, and it was considered beautiful.

Such was like the bandit Zhi dividing his loot and giving the larger share to others, or the fish of the land moistening each other with foam. A small virtue born from great loss."

10.

"When a man has no public service, his family no tax or levy, he dwells in peace and works with joy, following Heaven's allotment and Earth's division, having enough food and clothing within, no struggle for power without. Who then would raise a weapon to steal?

When punishments were simple, the people rarely offended.

When laws multiplied, thieves increased. Is it that men once lacked greed and now are born with it?

No, when the rulers are pure and tranquil, the people naturally become upright. But when those below are weary and resentful, cleverness and deceit arise.

To follow nature itself might still restrain violence. But to burden men without rest, to take from them without end, to leave fields unplowed and granaries empty, to let looms fall silent and shuttles stop, while bellies are empty and bodies cold and yet to expect peace, is that possible?

Thus, the more one tries to cure disorder, the deeper disorder grows. The stricter the prohibitions, the more they are broken.

Bridges and tolls were meant to stop thieves, but cunning officials used them for thievery.

Weights and measures were meant to prevent deceit, but crooked men used them to deceive."

11.

"The great ministers were set up to support the state, but crafty ones feigned danger to seize power.

Weapons and armies were meant to bring peace, but bandits used them to make war.

All this, Bao said, comes from having rulers.

When men find something of profit, they fight for it.

Among the rich, the stakes are great.

But the quarrels of common folk are small, a contest of strength between peasants, which can go only so far.

They have no vast lands to covet, no cities to plunder, no gold or rank to compete for.

They cannot rally armies or command followers.

Yet when kings grow angry, they move armies, muster troops, and drive men who have no enmity to slay those with no guilt.

Corpses pile by the tens of thousands, and rivers run red with blood.

Cruel kings have existed in every age, spreading their violence so that no land escapes.

The loyal die at home, the people perish abroad.

Can this be compared to the petty quarrels of common men?

When rulers make sons serve kings instead of fathers, when loyalty replaces filial piety, when orders are obeyed above all else, what difference is there between having rulers and not?

In ancient days, houses were built only to keep out wind and rain, but now they are painted red and gilded with gold.

Clothes once only covered the body, now they are of silk and brocade.

Music once soothed the heart, now it stirs lust and madness.

Food once filled the belly, now forests are burned and rivers dredged to feed indulgence.

Thus Bao said “Since rulers bring excess, war, and suffering. Better to have none.”

12.

(Here begins Baopuzi’s rebuttal.)

Baopuzi said,

“Can we reject a thing entirely because some have abused it?

If, fearing fire, one destroys his house, or fearing waves, one fills the river. Is that wisdom?

When Yu ruled, and Yi and Xie served him, the palace was humble, the taxes light.

He made the people work by season, honored simplicity and thrift, and forbade luxury at the royal table.

Those who lived plain and honest lives were exalted. Those who oppressed and deceived were dismissed or punished.

Then songs of praise arose, and the people were at peace.

Why must we ruin the house for fear of burning, or block the river for fear of drowning?

To destroy government because some rulers are corrupt, is to ruin all order for one fault."

13.

Baopuzi said,

"Bao exalts the ideal of the ancient world without kings. I have already refuted that.

Yet afterward he answered me with many more words, too long to record in full.

I will extract the key points and question them directly."

14.

Bao said,

'Rulers seek rare treasures, collect strange curios, adorn useless things, and never satisfy their desire.'

Baopuzi replied,

"Tell me, were all rulers of old like this? Of course not.

I have heard that Emperor Yao cast away gold into the mountains, and Emperor Shun cast away jade into the valleys.

They ate coarse food and wore plain clothes.

They did not carve mountains for gems, nor smelt gold from stone, nor sail across the sea for feathers of kingfishers, nor net tortoises and shells from distant lands.

When clothing and ornaments are alike, dignity vanishes; when rank and title are the same, hierarchy collapses.

Therefore the Duke of Zhou established distinctions of noble and common, palaces had walls according to rank, crowns, banners, and chariots bore symbols suited to their station, and food offerings had regulated portions.

In years of disaster or mourning, the royal table was reduced accordingly.

Unending desire is not the fault of the Way.

What Bao condemns applies only to the tyrants Jie and Zhou, not to the wise kings of old.

He cites their crimes but not the sages' restraint, that cannot stand as a balanced judgment."

15.

Bao said,

'The ruler's harem holds three thousand women, how could that be Heaven's will? When grain and silk fill the storehouses, the people starve and freeze.'

Baopuzi answered,

"The number of royal consorts was fixed by the sages.

Sages unite their virtue with Heaven and Earth, could they have done so merely to indulge desire?

The consorts serve to harmonize yin and yang, to assist in sacrifice to the ancestors, to weave the ritual garments, and to continue the royal lineage.

According to the Rites of Zhou and the Geography of Han, women in the world outnumber men.

The ruler's share of them is far too small to diminish what remains for marriage.

Think on this carefully, Master Bao.

Kings and queens together teach the people through farming and weaving.

The ruler plows at the sacred field, the empress leads the women in sericulture.

Commoners follow their example, those who farm well are rewarded, the idle are punished, taxes are one-tenth of the harvest, sufficient for public needs.

Households store grain for hard years, the state holds reserves for nine.

Each works in season and is not overburdened, and so the people lack neither food nor clothing.

When food is plenty and hearts are calm, courtesy and virtue arise naturally.

In the age of Emperors Wen and Jing, the people farmed diligently, homes were full, and the state granaries overflowed to rotting.

Even so, nobles lived in comfort yet the poor did not suffer.

Because taxes were moderate and rulers restrained their spending, abundance reached all.

But in later times, officials abandoned the old order.

They sought profit in idle crafts and luxury trades.

The means of producing grain grew narrow, while those who lived by taking grew many.

Thus famine came, not from the existence of rulers, but from the loss of their virtue.

You blame the king, when the fault lies with neglectful ministers.

If you condemn selection and hierarchy, if you despise agriculture and tribute, if you would destroy both rule and measure, then who will till the fields and who will lead the people?

Without a sovereign to unify the realm, the worthy would have no one to serve, and the wicked none to fear.

Even a net with wide holes still catches fish. Shall we then have no net at all?"

16.

Bao said,

"Life itself is burden enough with the need for food and clothing, yet rulers add taxes and labor. Hunger and cold strike together, the people cannot endure, and so they break the law. Is this not the cause of crime?"

Baopuzi replied,

"The spider spins its web and lacks no food, the flea and the louse never go hungry. How can humans, the most ingenious of all creatures, find survival so difficult?

The problem is not the existence of rulers, but that the wealthy know no limit and the powerful have endless wants.

Would you abandon all order because some are greedy?

Would you give up walking because you once stumbled?

If you mean that in later ages taxes have grown heavy, then yes, that is worthy of criticism.

If you mean that the toil of the people leads to unrest, that too can be true.

But to say that having rulers and levies itself causes chaos, that is false.

Tell me, in the golden ages of Yao and Shun, or the prosperous times of the Three Dynasties, were there no taxes or duties?

Did kings and ministers plow their own fields to feed the realm?

No, yet the world was peaceful.

Bao only speaks of hunger and hardship, but forgets that when bellies are full and hearts are idle, men become arrogant and forget right and wrong.

Order comes not from want, but from balance."

17.

Bao said,

"The ruler walks as if over deep water and treads the tail of a tiger, fearing danger at every step.

He rises early and eats late, yet still fears disaster. If he is truly wise, why such dread?"

Baopuzi answered,

"If he truly governs so, then he is a sage.

But kings seldom do. Their sickness lies in arrogance and indulgence, in exalting the unworthy and dismissing the wise.

King Jie pointed to Heaven and Sun to boast of his power.

The First Emperor of Qin sought to outlast all time, and both fell in ruin.

If a ruler trembles before danger, listens to counsel, and accepts correction, what harm could come?

When the ruler is vigilant, order returns. When he is careless, treachery spreads.

If even with kings there is risk of chaos, how much more without them?”

18.

Bao said,

“Kings pursue omens and marvels, drawing rare beasts from the wilderness, summoning white pheasants and jade rings, thinking such things will glorify their virtue. But of what use are they to the common folk?”

Baopuzi replied,

“When the virtue of a ruler reaches Heaven, Heaven responds with signs.

When his virtue reaches the Earth, the Earth gives its omens.

The bright star shines beside the moon to aid its light, and the glowing crown of the sun marks the course of time.

Sacred birds sing from palace eaves, golden beasts gleam beside clear ponds. These are not bought with gifts or coaxed with words.

It is only false kings like Wang Mang who feigned virtue, deceived the court, and sent emissaries abroad to beg for portents.

Can we take the lies of one man as proof that all omens are false?

When one sees a tail ten feet long, he knows the creature is not small; when one sees teeth a yard wide, he knows the mouth is vast.

So too when Heaven sends wonders, it shows that its favor reaches far.

When the Queen Mother of the West sent envoys, it proved that divine transformation knows no bounds.

When the southern tribes crossed seas to offer gifts, it showed that virtue had spread to the ends of the world.

Remote lands cannot be conquered by force, nor barbarians compelled by threat.

Only in perfect order do they come of themselves.

How could such harmony exist without kingship?

Do you think the Zhou kings prized jade rings because they lacked wealth, or desired the white pheasant to fill their kitchens?

No, they cherished them because they were signs of peace, symbols that the people were content, and that Heaven and Earth rejoiced.

Where oppression is gone and none are displaced, even the worms and birds find joy.

What greater blessing could there be for a realm?”

19.

Bao said,

“The ruler fears hidden plots and treachery, so he builds walls and fortresses. What use is this but to exhaust the people?”

Baopuzi replied,

“The Book of Changes honors fortification as wisdom.

Why then condemn defense?

Since Heaven and Earth first divided, good and evil have coexisted.

The sages knew that wickedness is born with men, that the foolish cannot be changed, as spring’s warmth cannot revive dead wood, nor summer’s heat melt iron.

Therefore they took warning from danger before it arose, dug moats, built walls, and kept watch at night.

They prepared armies not to fight, but to prevent fighting.

To discard such measures would be folly.

The ox has horns and the phoenix has talons. Heaven gave them, though they may rarely use them.

Bees carry venom to guard their hive, birds carry reeds to mend their nests, badgers burrow deep to avoid attack, and buffalo form ranks to repel the tiger.

Shall man alone throw away his armor and break his walls?

If blades remain sharp though no battle is fought, if fortresses stand though no siege comes, what harm is there?

Yet if the walls fall and the swords are gone, and enemies still arise, then even craftsmen like Gongshu and Mozi could not save us.

Master Bao, if you tear down the walls and cast away the shields, where will your wisdom lead you then?”

20.

Someone said,

“If there were nothing worth coveting, then even without fortresses no one would invade.”

Baopuzi replied,

“What is worth coveting? Must it be gold and jade? Even the tip of a knife or the leaf of a tree can stir contention.

The Yue fought the Chu over the shedding of a serpent’s skin.

Wu and Chu went to war over a single mulberry leaf.

In times of famine, people eat one another bare-handed.

From the distant past to the present there have always been men like Fu Hou and Zi Gao, who judged crimes with fairness, or like Yu Gong and Shi Zhi, who accepted death without complaint and these all lived under kings.

When widowers were protected and the Four Peaks were clear of corruption, when the obscure were lifted up and the worthy all brought forward.

When butchers cast down their knives and entered the golden gates, when builders left their tools and rose to ministerial rank, when keepers of cattle became counselors, when fugitives were made generals.

Tell me, was there no ruler then?

At such times, virtue and order were manifest.

Men of high and low birth alike could find their path.

Can this be said of an age without kings?”

21.

Bao said,

“When the fields lie fallow and the granaries are empty, it is all because rulers exist.”

Baopuzi replied,

“Is the ruler a weed that chokes the fields? Is the minister a rat that eats the grain?

The ruin of crops and the emptiness of storehouses come from floods, droughts, and plagues, not from taxation itself.

From of old, food has been the first of the eight affairs of state, ‘the people’s Heaven’, as the ancients said.

Hou Ji himself plowed the sacred fields, Yao and Shun bent their backs to the furrow, and in those times the harvest overflowed, and granaries were filled to the rafters.

The White Canal drained the salt marshes into fertile soil.

Shao Fu raised embankments at Yangling and piled grain into mountains.

Duke Shu Ao of Chu built the dam of Qisi so that every house had rotten grain stored away.

Zhao Guo invented the three-bladed plow, enriching all the lands west of the passes.

Ren Yan taught the farmers of Jiuzhen, and the people prospered in abundance.

Tell me, were those not ages with kings?

Without rulers, who would have opened the canals, built the embankments, devised the plow, or taught the multitudes to farm?

Thus the full fields and peaceful granaries of the world are the fruit of guidance, not its denial.

To imagine plenty without order, to expect peace without governance, is like wishing for harvest without seed, or for music without strings."

Chapter 49 - Knowing When to Stop (知止)

1.

Baopuzi said,

The greatest blessing is to have no endless desire, the deepest fortune is to know when to stop.

To hold fullness while keeping humility brings safety, to rest in ease and luxury brings danger.

The sages of old such as Shan Juan, Chao Xu, and Guan Hu soared with dragons and rose above clouds.

They saw the hook within the sweet bait, they saw the overturned cart upon the path ahead.

They avoided the narrow road of peril and found the far shore of safety.

They escaped the snare of ambition and the net of fame.

They saw ice before frost, they moved firewood before the blaze, they drew the oars before the storm.

They would not rest on reeds nor lie on the edge of a broken cliff.

Their spirits were vast, their vision clear, they rose beyond their time, they were not moved by common desire.

Their hearts were calm, their minds were pure, nothing could stain their nature or cloud their clarity.

If one does not have such stillness, he cannot walk beyond the track of the world.

When work is complete one should withdraw, when the task is done one should rest.

The hare is eaten when the hunt is over, the fine bow is stored when the bird is gone.

To look into the mirror of Peng and Han is to learn when to retire, to recall Yue Zhong's plan is to know the value of quiet.

Fan Li sailed away at dawn and vanished in peace, Xue Ping left the chaos and kept his purity.

The two Shu resigned at the height of glory, Tian Yu cast off his seal when his time was done.

They escaped both shame and regret, their virtue cleared the dust of ages, their words dispelled confusion for those to come.

Compared with their treasure of character, what use is gold?

2.

Some fail because their plans are too large, some collapse because their burden is too heavy.

Some are right alone against the world, some speak with loyalty yet fall among intrigue.

Chao Cuo perished for high policy, Wu Qi was killed for pure devotion.

Even the wise cannot always escape.

The Duke of Zhou was banished, Confucius wandered, Jia Yi was dismissed beneath fools, Sima Qian suffered unjust pain.

Le Yi destroyed Qi, Wu Yuan defeated Chu, Bai Qi won a hundred wars, Wen Zhong made Yue strong, Han Xin raised an empire, Ying Bu founded a kingdom, yet all met disaster.

To ignore this is blindness.

To serve as a minister is never easy, the secret lies in choosing a worthy lord.

Those who withdraw and yield to the virtuous are both safe and clean, their names remain bright, their peace is deep.

Such fortune is beyond measure, yet few can attain it.

Fortune and misfortune come by human choice, who can avoid reflection?

Few enjoy hearing the bitter word, those who seek glory in flattery hasten to ruin.

When blame is near, none will listen to truth, and when truth is silent, what hope remains?

3.

When arrows fill the sky, the birds fold their wings, when traps fill the path, the unicorn hides its trace.

Emotion cannot be carried to the limit, desire cannot be made full.

The wise use principle to rule feeling and reason to quiet desire.

If one must be cautious even when serving others, how much more when acting for oneself.

He who knows contentment is always content, he who knows not contentment is forever poor.

Contentment draws blessing, greed draws disaster.

The Song family stretched their sprouts and ruined their crops, the men of Ying stretched their leather and tore it.

They sought quick gain and brought quick loss.

To advance and forget retreat is the way to fall.

4.

Those who run without rest soon stumble, those who swim without pause soon sink.

He who plays endlessly with the blade will be cut, he who strikes without end will break his weapon.

Fullness must empty, that is nature’s law.

Even the vessels of the Zhou temple leaned to remind of balance.

Yang You was warned as he drew his bow, Dongye was known to fail as he drove his chariot.

After success, few can remain long.

Not all who drink become drunk, yet most who are drunk have drunk too much.

Not all who are rich face ruin, yet many fall from wealth.

The wise see reversal within fortune, they act before decay begins.

They fell the tree before the root rots, they plan the robe before the foxes gather.

Some feigned madness, some pretended ignorance, not from joy in folly but because the time demanded it.

Even so, some who hid in mountains drowned in storm, some who fled the world perished in flame.

Gong Sheng starved himself to death, Li Ye drank poison to end his life.

The shadow of fame lingers even in retreat.

He who walks as on thin ice and lives as in shadow, whose step leaves no trace and whose stillness joins the Way, such a one has no fear.

But those who seek brightness and beat drums to show worth, who stand in the light to prove their skill, how can they last long?

In bright ages one may help the world, in dark ages it is hard even to save oneself.

This has been the sigh of many men.

5.

Nothing blazing stays unburned, nothing overflowing stays whole.

Flame carries the sign of ash, spring grass already holds autumn’s death.

At noon the sun declines, when full the moon begins to fade.

All things that rise must fall, all works complete must rest.

Great towers crumble because of their height, fine food harms because of excess.

How much more those who climb higher still and cease not, whose power shakes the court yet grows unchecked.

A fly may fall from the mountain and live, a tiger falls from a cliff and dies.

The greater the weight, the greater the fall.

He who speaks truth and offends power will meet resentment,

he who bends truth and pleases power will lose his virtue.

To stand between both is hardship indeed.

Few preserve both name and life, many stumble and perish.

Yet within the halls of those who prosper, silk and color surround them.

Beauty and song delight their heart, wine and fragrance never cease, praise fills their ears and flattery fills the air.

They look down upon the ancients, and think none can compare to themselves.

6.

They do not see that rise and fall follow one another, that joy and sorrow take turns like morning and night.

Would they ever leave their red gates and return to the field?

Would they ever lay down rank and seek the peace of the hills?

Only when a sage rules above and the great worthy aids him, when the hundred offices depend upon one hand and the people prosper beneath one heart, can one stand high without fear and be full without danger.

Such men are beyond these warnings.

But for all others, the wise word remains.

Know when to stop.

Chapter 50 - Adversity and Success (窮達)

1.

Someone asked,

“If a person has true talent, why is it that some remain obscure while others rise to greatness?

Do not the gifted feel resentment when they are confined?”

Baopuzi replied,

“When skill and virtue are the same, yet some are raised and some are pressed down, it is because they lack one who truly knows them.

Misfortune and success follow the times, blockage and passage follow destiny.

He who understands the time has no resentment in retreat, he who knows his fate has no grief in lowly station.

The still pool and the deep valley contain clear strength, yet without use they cut nothing.

The pearl that glows in the dark and the jade of great value, if left in the mud, are soon covered by stones.

A thing may be worthy and yet not be known, it may be useful and yet never be used.

Common men are blind to differences, they cannot tell vermilion from purple, nor beans from wheat.

They call the successful man wise, not knowing that his success may come by chance.

They call the poor man foolish, not knowing that his poverty may come from holding to virtue.

If the image did not hang in heaven, it could not shine its great light across all space.

If Mount Tai were not rooted in the earth, it could not rise above the clouds.

The rabbit runs fast because the path is smooth, the dragon boat moves swiftly because of the current.

Fire will not burn without the one who kindles it, and fine metal will not shine without the craftsman's hand.

Flowers bloom only when spring returns, wild geese fly far only when the high wind lifts them.

If the rulers of the age do not recognize the worthy, then the talented remain unknown.

If Shuye does not recommend, then Guan Zhong will not rise.

Rang Ju needed Ping Zhong to gain command, Han Xin needed Xiao He to soar.

Juan Sheng advanced through Sheng Zhi's counsel, Qu Ni rose by Wu Zhi's praise, Yuan Zhi was raised by Kongming, and Gongjin was exalted by Xingba.

Through these connections they gained enduring fame and great deeds in their time."

2.

"In the late Han and the final days of Wu, it was no longer so.

When they recommended men, they put forward only those who served their own interest.

When they chose officials, they relied on those with many followers.

Those who agreed with them were advanced, even if they were unfit.

Those who opposed them were rejected, even if they were wise.

They trusted the dull and mediocre, they could not set aside their private feelings.

They knew the truly gifted, but could not be fair in judgment.

They cast away balance and weighed by favoritism, they abandoned measure and counted by reputation.

Thus the so-called elegant and refined of the time, those who held power and influence, could hardly escape this stain.

Worse still, in their hearts they envied the independent, despised the unaligned, feared those who surpassed them, and ignored the poor and plain.

How tragic that those pure of spirit and unlike the crowd stood together in failure, countless in number.

Some were left wandering in marsh and wilderness, some were driven from court and cast aside."

3.

"Many have cultivated virtue yet their Way did not spread, many have hidden talent yet their time did not come.

Some waited for the Yellow River to clear and died before they saw it.

Some spent their lives in loyalty and toil but were never recognized.

They had power to aid the world, yet their gifts lay unused.

Their precious worth was buried in the mud, their ability to save others never found a place.

Some held the hammer but never met a King Wu, some held the rod but never met a Lord of Zhou.

From the past to the present this has been endless.

To mourn it too deeply is ignorance.

One who sees the long road ahead but is ashamed to walk it, one who knows the Way is blocked but refuses to change, both err equally.

To accept both success and failure as one path, to leave honor and shame to the course of nature, such a man holds no sorrow at being unknown, nor sighs long at the passing of time.

To think that he resents obscurity is not to understand the mind of the true sage.

The young do not comprehend the aged, the frog in the well does not know the sea.

So it has always been.”

Chapter 51 - On Speaking Too Much (重言)

1.

Baopuzi said,

I once had a friend named Master Xuanbo, a man who from youth devoted himself to learning.

Before reaching manhood, he had already exhausted the Six Strategies and studied the rivers and the Luo.

By day he examined the remnants of the sun’s light, by night he watched the afterglow of the moon.

No path of the Way was too distant for him to explore, no teaching too subtle for him to probe.

He used the learning of Confucians and Mohists as his city walls, and the sharpness of his mind as his shield and spear.

Those who debated with him looked up in awe and often withdrew with reverence.

Men of letters admired him and sharpened their pens to match his style.

Yet one day, he suddenly awakened to the truth that the truly wise do not contend in speech.

He realized that to avoid fault, one must measure even the smallest word.

When the heart is clear, fine ornaments may be discarded like weeds.

When the Way is lost, high song finds no harmony.

So he followed Laozi’s warning against excess and remembered the bronze man whose lips were sealed three times.

He drew back the edge of his brilliance, hid his sharpness within, and trained his hand only for the quiet flow of the brush.

He held gold and jade in his heart, yet restrained the splendor of words.

From dawn till dusk he often spoke no word at all.

2.

One of his students once said,

“Master, you remain silent. How can we, your students, learn to speak?

You seem no different from ordinary men.

Surely a bell that never rings is no more than a lump of metal, and a chime that never sounds is no different from a pile of stones.”

Master Xuanbo replied,

“I seek not fame in this age but understanding in ages to come.

I do not strive for quick recognition or transient praise.

The potter makes a vessel for wine, but unless it is used, its beauty is unseen.

A man of low rank who speaks of lofty matters gains no trust.

If one exhausts his voice in endless talk, what rescue can there be from confusion?

The ancients said that at sixty they laughed at what they had believed at fifty-nine, and so turned back from error. This has meaning indeed.

The hardness of jade, the strength of metal, the cold of ice, the heat of fire.

Must these proclaim themselves to be known?

Sounding boards and melodies always have some flaw, even the best archer may still miss a mark, those who lean over the river often drown, and those who love argument often err with their tongue.

Bo Ya played with care, so he never tired his hands.

The true scholar guards his words, so he never meets disgrace.

But shallow minds do not understand this.

They debate over the void, argue over trifles, and waste speech.

They preach about hard and white, broad and narrow, yet none of it is useful.

They recite books of the minor schools that go against the sages, diminishing truth and deepening confusion.

They call this subtle and profound, but abandon the true classics to chase strange doctrines.

Some quarrel with the blind to prove themselves sharp, some show off clever words before the ignorant.

Without equal opponents or understanding listeners, such speech is like performing fine music beside a wooden stump, or displaying bright silks before clay idols.

Their mouths grow dry, their breath weakens.

They pound the table and clap their hands, axes blunted, their arguments tangled.

Their faces turn red with anger, ugly words spill out, and vanity is born in the midst of shame.

Once the error leaves the mouth, it cannot be undone.

Better to echo the great teaching, that the finest sound is almost silent, and the truest speech is few in words, waiting quietly for the wise to hear.”

Chapter 52 - Self-Account / Autobiographical Preface (自敘)

1.

Baopuzi said:

“I, Baopuzi, am surnamed Ge (葛), named Hong (洪), styled Zhichuan (稚川), a native of Jurong, Danyang.

My remote ancestor was Ge Tianshi, said to have once ruled the world in ancient times.

His descendants became princes among the feudal states, and thereafter took Ge as their clan name.

My forefather served as Governor of Jingzhou during the usurpation of Wang Mang.

Ashamed to serve a usurper, he resigned and joined Zhai Yi of Dongjun to raise troops in righteous revolt.

Defeated by Wang Mang’s forces, he escaped death only by imperial amnesty, and thereafter withdrew from public life, feigning illness to sever all worldly ties.

Fearing his influence, Wang Mang exiled the family to Langya.

My ancestor’s son, Ge Lulü, later raised troops for Emperor Guangwu and rendered great service in restoring the Han.

For this, he was ennobled as General of the Chariots and Cavalry, and created Marquis of Tong County in Xiapi, with five thousand households as his fief."

2.

"At the founding of the dynasty, my ancestor the Marquis's younger brother Wen followed him in many campaigns and won distinction.

The Marquis petitioned the throne to recognize Wen's merit, but officials replied that he had no formal commission, and could not be rewarded.

The Marquis said:

'My brother shared every peril in battle, his body scarred, one eye lost, yet he receives no recognition, while I sit draped in purple robes and gold. How can my heart be at peace?'

He therefore memorialized the court to transfer his title to his brother.

The emperor, admiring his virtue, granted it.

Wen declined, but could not refuse.

He built his residence in Bohwangli, traces of whose foundations still remain.

Later, unwilling to burden the state, the elder brother Ge Lulü crossed south over the Yangtze and settled in Jurong, devoting his family to farming and classical study.

Their descendants, by nature quiet and learned, lived in rustic reclusion for generations."

3.

"My grandfather was learned in all subjects, deep in subtle reasoning, skilled in letters beyond comparison.

He had the talent to govern a nation.

He served as Prefect of Haiyan, Lin'an, and Shanyin, later rising through the ranks to become Vice Minister of Personnel, Censor-in-Chief, Grand Herald, Palace Attendant, and finally General Who Assists Wu, enfeoffed as Marquis of Wushou County.

My father was famed for filial piety and brotherly affection, a model of integrity.

He served the state of Wu as Gentleman of the Five Offices, County Magistrate of Jiancheng and Nanchang, Censor-in-Chief, Prefect of Kuaiji, and finally Grand Master of Ceremonies.

His governance was mild yet just, his administration pure and popular.

The fields were orderly, crime was absent, gifts from the people never crossed his gate, and even his writing materials were purchased from his own means.

He was later appointed Chamberlain to the King of Wu, known for upright remonstrance, and died in office as Prefect of Shaoling."

4.

“I, the third son of my father’s younger brother, was born late and indulged by my parents.

At thirteen I lost my father, and thus had no one to guide my study.

In poverty I labored at the plow, enduring hunger and cold, rising before dawn, working past dusk.

Fire and war destroyed our ancestral books.

In spare hours I would borrow what I could, carrying a bundle of scrolls from place to place.

Often I copied texts by firelight, using scrap paper written on both sides, so that others could scarcely read them.

At sixteen I began the Xiaojing, Lunyu, Shijing, and Yijing.

Lacking money for travel, I could not seek teachers.

My learning was shallow, my understanding limited.

Yet I read greedily, memorizing all I saw.

From the Classics, the Histories, the Hundred Schools, down to minor tales, I read nearly ten thousand scrolls.

Forgetful by nature, slow of wit, my thought scattered.

I was never a pure Confucian, nor fit to teach.

The Hetu and Luoshu I glimpsed only briefly.

Astronomy and divination I ignored, as tasteless pursuits for idle minds.”

5.

“In later years I dabbled in geomancy, augury, the Three Origins, Taiyi, and the Six Rens, but did not study deeply.

I found them to be tools for men of ambition, useful in service, not for cultivation.

Better to study filial piety than to weary the spirit in such arts.

Books in the world number thirteen thousand volumes by the old catalogues, and have doubled since the Wei era.

Knowing my limits, I lamented the vastness of what I could not read.

I once planned to travel to the capital to seek rare books, but rebellion broke out and I turned back.

Now, nearing forty, my zeal declines.

I follow the teaching of loss upon loss, and live simply, tending field and garden.

My learning wanes daily, and I accept it calmly.”

6.

“I am slow and rustic by nature, dull of tongue and plain of face.

My clothes are old, my shoes worn, yet I feel no shame.

While the fashions of the world change endlessly, I keep to the constant.

I speak only truth, never jest.

Hence my neighbors call me The Man Who Embraces Simplicity (Baopu), and thus I took it as my title.

Frail in body and often ill, poor without carriage or servants, I remained secluded, rarely venturing out.

My house leaks, my walls crumble, my meals barely suffice, yet I do not grieve.

I never flatter the powerful, nor seek favor from the rich.

To visit the sick or mourn the dead I strive, but if illness prevents me, I feel no guilt.

I care not for those who misjudge me, only for keeping my heart upright.

The discerning may pardon my plainness, the vulgar will not.”

7.

“I shun those who profit without righteousness.

The officials who sell appointments, the magnates who extort, the petty tyrants who seize the poor man’s field.

Because I refuse to join them, they slander me as proud and aloof.

Thus no carriages pass my gate, no guests fill my hall.

Only dust gathers on the mats.”

8.

“From youth to age, I have never spoken of others faults nor exposed their shame.

Even toward servants, I never mocked their failings.

When compelled to comment, I name only another’s virtues.

Of writing, I praise the beautiful, not the flawed.

Hence none resent my judgment.

I refrain from gossip, for praise breeds envy, and censure breeds hatred.

It is better to be silent and at peace.”

9.

“Some reproach me for refusing to assess others.

I reply: ‘Even I cannot measure myself, how could I measure others?’

The men of the late Han were ruined by faction and slander.

The “monthly judgments” of Xu Shao made enemies of kinsmen.

How can one so easily know another’s heart?

Even Yao and Confucius could not fully know men.

Shall I, with a candle’s dim flame, presume to judge the sun?”

10.

“In the rebellion of Shi Bing during the Da’an era, chaos spread across six provinces.

The Grand Commander pressed me to serve as a Captain of the Troops.

Reluctant yet fearing the law, I raised several hundred men.

When battle came, treasure lay heaped like mountains, and the soldiers scattered to plunder.

I forbade it and executed one who disobeyed.

Soon the enemy ambushed, the looters were cut down, but my troops, disciplined, stood unbroken and saved the army.

For this I was named General Who Subdues the Waves and given a hundred bolts of cloth.

I divided it among the soldiers, and used the rest to feast them with meat and wine.

For a day, I was praised across the camp."

11.

"When peace returned, I cast off armor and went to Luoyang, not to seek rank, but books.

Like Lu Lian who refused gold, I declined rewards and honors.

But the empire was again in turmoil, the roads impassable.

Summoned later to serve in the south, I accepted only to avoid danger.

Offered posts by generals, I declined.

For wealth and status are but guests, bright today, gone tomorrow, like spring flowers withering overnight.

Better to follow the Way of Song and Qiao, nourishing life on one's own.

So I withdrew to the mountains, to cultivate spirit and seek longevity."

12.

“From fifteen or sixteen, I wrote poetry and essays, but later found them crude and destroyed most.

In the wars I lost many manuscripts, but later compiled anew:

The Inner Chapters, twenty volumes on the Way.

The Outer Chapters, fifty on worldly matters.

Poems and inscriptions, a hundred.

Military memorials and letters, thirty.

Lives of the Immortals, ten volumes.

Lives of the Recluses, ten more.

Selections from the Classics, Histories, and Miscellanies, three hundred ten volumes.

The Inner Chapters concern Taoist alchemy, spirit, and longevity, the Outer Chapters treat ethics and human affairs.

I saw Emperor Wen of Wei’s Dianlun Preface.

He omitted his trivial arts, yet I will mention even what I do not excel at.”

13.

“I am dull and plain, fond of nothing worldly.

From childhood, I never gambled, raced dogs, or fought cocks.

I have never learned chess or dice.

Such games waste time, breed anger and greed, and destroy virtue.

I prefer a single scroll of good writing to all the diversions under Heaven.”

14.

“In youth I learned archery, weak but accurate.

In war I once felled two enemies with one arrow.

I trained in sword and halberd, but considered them lesser arts, useful only when the world goes mad.

Such skills are as horns on a unicorn, wondrous, but seldom needed.”

15.

“I vowed early never to pursue office.

I admired the recluses of old. Chaofu, Xu You, Yan Guang, and the Two Jiangs.

I wished only to write one great book to show my thought to later ages.

When later summoned by the great generals and governors, I declined all.

I was once awarded the title Marquis of Guanzhong and two hundred households, but considered it undeserved.

I sought to emulate Lu Lian's humility and Tian Chou's withdrawal, yet was compelled by imperial decree to accept.

Thus I bowed and obeyed, but remained unmoved within."

16.

"When I composed this Self-Account,

some asked:

'Why write your own life now, while still in your prime?

Are you not like Wang Chong, who feared his name would perish?'

I answered:

'The heavens are vast, and man but a guest within them.

The mushroom that blooms at dawn withers by dusk.

The gale, the lightning, the meteor, all pass in an instant.

Who can be sure of tomorrow?

Those who soared like dragons, or ruled like tigers, whose deeds filled chronicles and whose songs echoed through the ages.

Still, their bodies have vanished into dust.

I, poor and obscure, unsuited to my age, lacking powerful kin or friends, my voice unlike the world's, my step contrary to its path.

How can I expect history to record me?

Therefore, while yet alive, I have written this account myself, not to boast, but to leave trace for those to come.'